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the old custom of giving the father of the girl two or more bark-cloths. In 144 marriage contracts I recorded small sums of money were paid in 86 cases, i.e. 59 per cent., and in six villages where I made marriage censuses an average of 6*s*. 6*d*. was paid for the *mpango* of the girl. The old bark-cloths were replaced by calico cloths, and many *mpango* are still paid in this fashion, and later by the money to buy the cloth. The 10*s*. given the father-in-law as the 'money to cut the trees' is merely the wage for a month's work at European rates.

Baskets, pots, axes, and other objects made by the Bemba craftsmen were always paid for by goods in kind or by service, and for these dues money has been nearly everywhere substituted. Even then, the purchase is not subject to the ordinary laws of demand and supply, since once the regulation sum for a basket or a pot has been fixed at 3*d*. or 6*d*. there it will remain, however scarce the materials of which it is made.

The use of money in Bemba ritual life is largely due to its rarity value. It has the prestige of an object that comes from a foreign country and which is possessed by few members of the community. Before the arrival of the white man it is clear that articles that came from far off, brought by Arabs, or sent as presents to the chiefs, had a particular value, and were kept as presents of honour or marks of status. Hence they were considered particularly suitable as offerings to the ancestral spirits. The use of bark-cloth for this purpose was common here as in other parts of Bantu Africa, but it was not the local bark-cloth that was hung on the shrine of the ancestor, but the valuable calico brought by Arab traders. In the same way I have seen barrels of guns stuck in the ground over the grave of a chief (Cilubi Island on Lake Bangweolu) and have been asked by the Paramount for china plates for the same purpose. He told me that plates or tea-pots had been offered to the spirits in this way in the old days because they were 'valuables' (*ifyuma*) and because 'we had not seen any before'. Cattle taken in war were also considered necessary for some ancestral sacrifices, although the Bemba are not a pastoral people. Money has apparently acquired a similar rarity value which it has not yet lost. A present of a coin is appreciated not only on its own account but because of the kudos it gives. Most Europeans hesitate to give money as a present to an equal or to a superior because it is a currency used for the ordinary run of economic transactions, and therefore seems to give a

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PART VI

ORGANIZING THE WORK

CHAPTER XVII

RELIGION AND MAGIC IN ECONOMIC LIFE

The Nature of Economic Ritual.

THE fundamental Bemba beliefs in the powers of their ancestral spirits have already been referred to constantly, whether in relation to their political organization, their system of land tenure, or their general attitude towards the production and collection of food. But the ritual of their ancestor worship remains to be outlined, and in particular the part it plays in their whole economic life. The Bemba pray, or offer sacrifices, at all the chief events of the agricultural year such as tree-cutting, sowing, and harvest. Formerly this ceremonial seems to have been unusually rich and complex, especially that performed at the Paramount Chief's court. Nowadays the rites are carried out with diminishing ceremony, by fewer people, and often with great secrecy, owing to severe discouragement from some of the missionaries in the area. But the beliefs associated with these rites still seemed to me to dominate the people's thoughts and to affect their agricultural efforts, while the ceremonies themselves, even when temporarily abandoned, were often resumed at times of ill luck or catastrophe. They had still to be reckoned as one of the most important sanctions of the chief's authority, and were hence unfailingly performed at the latter's court.

For all these reasons it is important for our special purpose to estimate the function of these magico-religious practices in Bemba economic life and, consequently, the effect which their lapse is likely to have on the production of food in the territory as a whole. In a tribe living at this particular level of development it is chiefly human energy and purpose which makes the difference between failure and success, and ritual has often been described as one of the chief means by which the courage and industry of a primitive people is kept at its height. This pragmatic aspect of magic and religion was first emphasized by Malinowski in his analysis of

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Melanesian gardening and fishing.[1] Here he describes the series of magic acts which give confidence to the Trobriand fisherman embarking in a primitive vessel on a dangerous sea, or to the gardener about to start on the year's agricultural work. No less significant, in his view, is the function of an organized system of gardening magic in actually co-ordinating the activities of the whole community, since each individual waits for the appropriate ceremonial before beginning on his next agricultural task, and thus accepts the economic leadership of the gardening magician in charge. Radcliffe-Browne, in his study of a still more primitive community, that of the Andaman islanders, has also approached the question of ritual from a functional point of view.[2] He considers that the ceremonial associated with food production—the chief activity of each member of the society—not only impresses upon the individual the traditional tribal attitude towards this important pursuit, but also, as an additional function, gives a public affirmation of the unity of the group itself, a sentiment which is essential if successful economic co-operation is to be achieved.

Both these aspects of ritual seem to be apparent in the Bemba magico-religious system—the direct help which the rites give to the individual in his particular anxieties and difficulties, as well as their more indirect action in maintaining the confidence of the whole community and its sense of cohesion. From the purely economic point of view it is, of course, impossible to prove the pragmatic value of Bemba ceremonial in terms of increased agricultural output. Suffice it to say that in this area, as in the Trobriand islands, the rites seem to centre round those economic activities which give rise to the most doubts, fears, or anticipations among the people, itself a proof of the need they fulfil for each individual. For instance, the Bemba method of tree-cutting has been described as a pleasurable and exciting form of work, which the people consider very specially their own in contrast to the system of bush-clearing practised by neighbouring tribes. It is not surprising therefore that the annual *ukutema* ceremonies are reckoned as the most important of the whole year.[3] But this form

[1] Cf. 'Magic, Science, and Religion' in *Science, Religion and Reality*, edited by J. A. Needham, 1925, and *Coral Gardens and their Magic*, 1935.

[2] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *The Andaman Islanders*, 1922.

[3] I cannot find another instance of a bush-clearing ceremony in the literature dealing with the other Bantu peoples, nor have we sufficiently detailed material

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of pollarding the trees is dangerous, if delightful, and the Bemba principles of land-selection by means of trees have been shown to be by no means infallible. Thus the gardener feels fear as well as keenness in approaching the tree-cutting. This emotional attitude is directly reflected in the rite itself. Every prayer I heard made on such an occasion contained some urgent request for safety for the tree-climber or for the blessing of the spirits on the selection of the new garden site. The people's attitude towards reaping is in striking contrast. When I asked an informant why the women did not pray before harvesting their millet, the idea seemed to him rather ridiculous. He merely laughed and said, 'Why should a person pray before reaping? Can a woman fall when she is standing on the ground? It is the man who climbs the trees who may fall. Let him call on the *imipashi* for help'—a clear expression of the different feeling of the community towards two essential economic activities.

Clearing the bush also marks the beginning of the new agricultural year when each gardener must plan the amount of ground he intends to cultivate. It is obviously important to the whole community that he should start his work with the highest ambitions and hopes. Here again it would be difficult to prove that the tree-cutting ritual actually does have this effect, except under modern conditions when it is possible to compare villages in which the rites are still observed and others in which they have been curtailed or abandoned. And I shall later give evidence to show that where chiefs were carrying out the traditional forms of worship, or had returned to them after a temporary lapse, the ceremony at the capital was the occasion of talk and enthusiastic comment in the surrounding district and, I think, really did act as a stimulus to further work.

Of the other important agricultural processes the firing of the piled branches is also considered an exciting moment in the economic cycle, but the act itself is, of course, not a dangerous one, nor is there much skill attached to it. It occurs, too, at the end of the hardest work of the season, and not at its beginning. We shall find that, though the firing of the branches is ritualized among the Bemba, the ceremony is a very simple one, and informants tend to omit it in accounts of the yearly cycle. Sowing ceremonies are still performed in all the chief's capitals, but they are tending to

from those areas to be certain whether the absence of such ceremonies is correlated with a less dangerous form of tree-cutting such as stumping, &c., or not.

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disappear in other villages. In any case they are restricted to the subsidiary crops, and do not affect the staple millet. In some Bantu tribes these sowing rites seem to mark the beginning of the year's new activities and are thus treated as very solemn occasions, but among the Bemba the *ukutema* rites quite overshadow those at the *ukubyala*—the blessing of the seeds.[1] There are no hoeing or fencing rites among the Bemba. Both of these are arduous and important activities, but they depend upon human effort for their success and not upon luck. Harvest, in any agricultural community, is associated with complex emotions. The new food supplies bring delight, gratitude to the giver, and fresh possibilities of social life. The pulse of the village is quickened. Dancing, beer-drinks, and quarrels begin. The filling of the granaries makes the calculation of future needs inevitable, and the careless must be taught the tribal attitude towards the careful storing and handling of food. There may be a justifiable fear that the supplies will not last the rest of the year—an apprehension reflected among the Bemba in the many forms of magic of durability (*icibyalilo*) already described (cf. pp. 206–8). Thus it is not surprising that firstfruit rites in this, as in other Bantu societies, play an important part in the people's economic life and rival the tree-cutting ceremonies in their complexity. We can see from this analysis of the annual cycle how the ritual associated with each successive economic process depends on the nature of the particular activity and on the emotions of pleasure, doubt, or anxiety which are usually aroused by it.

How far the economic ritual of the Bemba actually synchronizes their activities is a question that is harder to answer. Formerly the people used apparently to wait to cut trees, to fire their gardens, or to sow until the chief had prayed for the ancestral spirits' blessings. Now they no longer do so in most commoners' villages, except in the case of the firing of the branches when there is a strong practical reason for their doing so (cf. p. 295). It must be remembered too that gardening is not in any sense a communal activity among the Bemba. The whole village does not work together in the millet gardens, and there would, therefore, be little

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[1] It is interesting to note that among the Bisa of Cibubi Island in the Bangweulu swamps, where tree-cutting has been abandoned, and a more or less fixed system of cultivation adopted, the bush-clearing rites have lapsed, but the sowing ceremonies seem to have gained correspondingly in importance.

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value in a complete co-ordination of every stage of their labour. But, nevertheless, the fact that each process of cultivation is preceded by its appropriate ceremony does act, I think, as a sign to laggards that the season, whether of bush-clearing or of sowing, has begun.[1] Further, since religious prerogatives are invariably combined with political authority, whether in the case of the headman, the sub-chief, or the chief, economic leadership inevitably falls to the man who officiates as priest at these annual ceremonies.

But this list does not exhaust the economic functions of the Bemba magico-religious ritual. Where the belief in the supernatural influence of the chiefs over the land is such an integral feature of politico-economic life, any social mechanism by which this faith is publically expressed and confirmed, is of fundamental importance from an agricultural point of view. In such circumstances, to believe in the chief is to cultivate in hope and in the assurance that the land is sure to yield its utmost, and these annual economic ceremonials, all directly controlled by the chief and addressed to his own ancestral spirits, are the occasions when his supernatural power is made manifest.

The rites themselves with their insistence on a hierarchical grading of status, give a public expression, as we shall see, to the whole system of political values on which food-production, land tenure, economic leadership, and the exploitation of tribal resources depends. And the Paramount's ability to organize a series of large and imposing ceremonies at his capital is considered a sign of the supernatural power he is able to wield. In fact, as will be shown, some of the ritual performed by the Citimukulu seems to exist to demonstrate this fact alone.

It is an interesting reflection of the highly centralized political system of the Bemba that the people rely almost entirely on the help of their ancestral spirits, and in particular, of course, that of the *imipashi* of the chiefs of the land in order to harvest their crops successfully. Magic is, relatively speaking, unimportant in their economic rites. The native makes a clear distinction between the magic and religious rite. He keeps the term *ubwanga* to mean the use of charms, usually parts of trees or shrubs handled in a traditional

[1] Members of the White Fathers Mission have told me that in the area round their Missions the departure of preachers on their Christmas tour round the villages is often taken in the same way as a sign that the later sowing of millet should begin.

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way[1] and prepared by a specialist *panga*, from whom its use may be bought. *Buanga* is used by the individual to protect himself from hostile forces, such as sorcery. He uses charms to increase the lasting power of the food in his gardens or granary (*icilyalilo*). He occasionally purchases counter-magic if he suspects a sorcerer of bewitching his millet store. Now and then I have seen charms put in gardens as a protection against birds or thieves. But, compared to some of the neighbouring tribes, the Bemba resort to economic magic rarely.[2] It is never used in tribal rites or by the chief in his capacity of priest of the tribe. It can never affect the productivity of the whole land as distinct from the individual garden. All public prayers and ceremonies are addressed to the ancestral spirits, and it is significant that the chief himself is not expected to use charms at all as far as his crops are concerned. 'Why should Citimukulu use *icilyalilo* like a commoner does?' said the official in charge of the chief's gardens. 'Hasn't he prayed to the chiefs of the land to give him food?' This statement seemed to me to be significant.[3]

This preliminary account shows us, I think, how the religious rites of the Bemba must have integrated tribal food production formerly and stimulated hard work. We must now proceed to a more detailed description of the ritual itself and estimate more exactly the part it still plays at the present day.

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The spirit centres. The *imipashi* of the Bemba are approached in certain well-defined ways—calling on the names of the ancestors, usually at the same time spitting in the air (*ukupala mate*); prayers uttered by priests usually at one of the many shrines throughout the territory (*ukulumbula*)—and the offering of some material object such as cloth, flour, beer, chickens, sheep, or cattle to the spirits (*ukupepa*). The spirit centres at which the *imipashi* are invoked can be arranged in the order of their sacredness. They include:

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[1] Often with the addition of a metal or part of an animal as an activating principle (*icishimba*).

[2] The neighbouring Bisa of Cilubi Island, for instance, invariably used protective magic against thefts in their cassava gardens, and Duke describes many of the same kind of charms among the Lamba (*op. cit.*, pp. 294–5). Whether this greater reliance on magic is associated with a less powerful belief in the chief I do not know.

[3] The supernatural functions of some S. African chiefs differ in this respect, since the Zulu, Swazi, and Tschwana chiefs owe much of their power to the possession of rain magic, and many of the S. African chiefs are 'doctored' magically at the beginning of their reign and at subsequent ceremonies.

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(1) *The individual's hut.* The hut of each householder is in a sense a shrine, since the spirits of his own ancestors and those of his wife are supposed to linger there, especially at dusk or in the early morning. The *imipashi* are addressed there at the birth, marriage, illness, or death of a member of the family or at any other event that concerns the group. In some areas a special calabash is reserved for the spirits, and beer is placed as an offering there overnight,[1] but I did not find any specially sacred spot in the hut reserved for the *imipashi*, as Smith and Dale describe among the Ila,[2] and as is common among some of the Southern Bantu. Objects to be blessed are placed at the head of the owner's bed as will be described.

(2) *Village shrines.* The hut of the headman is the centre of the religious life of the village, but in addition small shrines of grass about three feet high (*ifisaba*) are built to the spirits. I have seen these standing outside some headmen's huts, although this is rare nowadays, or else outside the village, usually among the garden beds. They are still quite commonly built in the latter position since their presence is more easily concealed than when they are built in the village. There may be one, two, or even up to twenty-five of these small spirit huts built, usually one to the headman's own ancestors, and the others to the dead chiefs of the district. The headman of the village is always the officiating priest at these shrines.

(3) *Dead chiefs' villages* (*ifibulya*). The sites of dead chiefs' villages are honoured as spirit centres (cf. Chap. XIII). Shrines are built on them after the chief's burial and, though these fall into decay, they are rebuilt on special occasions as long as memory lasts.[3] The sites of villages made by the first Bemba chiefs or chieftainesses are famous ritual centres with big shrines about six feet high built on them (e.g. the Shrine of Katongo Mukulu on the Lubu River or that of Bwalya Cabala near Citimukulu's village). Others are only known by the local people. All are rebuilt at the time of a big ceremony at the orders of the chief of the *icalo*, and the grass around them cleared on less important occasions (*ukukungula*). They are in the charge of local priests (*bashimapepo*).

[1] This practice is more common where Bisa influence is predominant.
[2] Smith and Dale, vol ii, p. 166.
[3] Compare the custom of the Batswana natives of planting a tree on the site of the dead chief's hut.

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usually descendants of the dead chief, and directly responsible to his living successor.

(4) *Natural phenomena* (*ngulu*). Remarkable natural phenomena like big waterfalls or caves are also considered to be spirit-centres believed to have been inhabited by legendary personages, e.g. the cave under the Cishimba Waterfall near Cilubula, the Canga cave filled with bats near Kasama, a queer pointed stone in the river near Kapatu, warm springs at Mwamba Kambwale in Munkonge's country where women only may catch the fish, &c. Many of these sites are also associated with a form of snake worship, or are believed to be inhabited by a python. Battle-grounds or places where many people have been known to be killed, are also feared and believed to be haunted by spirits (e.g. Musonda Cinanda in the Chinsali district where a number of Arabs are said to have been slaughtered). All these *ngulu* sites are in charge of local *bashimapepo* acting under the orders of the chief.

(5) *Burial groves of dead chiefs* (*mwalule*). It is characteristic of the centralized government of the Bemba that their big chiefs are buried in one place—Shimwalule in the Chinsali district—while the lesser chiefs and chieftainesses are buried in the grove of Bwalya Cabala near Citimukulu's village.[1] The great grove, a place kept with great secrecy and lying at about four days' walk from the capital, is said to have the greatest *impashi* of the land. The priest in charge, the *Shimwalule*, is himself the burier of the Citimukulu, and is in a sense the ultimate authority in the whole spiritual hierarchy since he alone can sacrifice for rain,[2] or in the old days could pray for success in war.

(6) *Sacred relic shrines* (*bakabilo*). The Paramount Chief, all the bigger territorial chiefs, and the most important *bakabilo*, possess relic shrines which are considered the ultimate source of their spiritual powers. These shrines are huts which resemble ordinary houses, but have their doors barred with logs or ivory tusks, and are kept with the utmost secrecy. They are hedged with taboos, and may only be entered by the chief, the 'wives of the relics' (*bamukabenye*), old women, descendants of the first chief's wives, and by the five most important *bakabilo*. They contain relics (usually stools) of the first holders of each particular title, by which the tribal spirits may be invoked. The most important religious rites of the Bemba are those by which a new Paramount acquires his

[1] Cf. pp. 240–1.

[2] Drought is very rare in this area.

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bakenye, and so the right of access to his ancestral spirits. The ceremonies he performs at the relic houses are prayers for the benefit of the whole tribe. In the case of the economic rites, he initiates at the *benye* hut a whole series of ritual acts which are subsequently performed throughout the land.

Thus, even a study of the places where the Bemba spirits may be called and the persons who are able to invoke their help, illustrates quite clearly the dual function of the ceremonies first as ritualizing the individual emotions associated with each economic activity and next as sacralising the political structure on which the tribe depends. The commoner calls on his own ancestors inside his own dwelling on occasions which affect the welfare of his family only. The headman appointed by the chief does the same in the case of the economic processes which affect the welfare of the village as a whole. Nowadays he does not always wait to perform his own local ceremony till he hears that the *mfumu* has carried out his, but his chief can still be called the spiritual head of the district since the priests of the different *ngulu*, or those in charge of the dead chief's *ifibolya*, offer the prayers at these sacred spots at his orders. He not only gives them the command, but he provides the cloth, beer, flour, or animal sacrifices which may be required for this purpose from time to time. The Paramount himself has already been described as in supreme command of the supernatural resources of the whole tribal territory, and a series of sacrifices offered, first in his own *icalo*, but next at the orders of the territorial chiefs, at the spirit centres in their respective districts will now be described.

Special Ceremonial at the Citimukulu's Court.

Any economic rite, whether tree-cutting or harvest, can take three different forms at the Paramount's capital:

(*a*) The ceremony can be performed by the 'wives of the relics' at the *bakenye* shrines of the chief, and in this case the rite is considered to affect the welfare of the chief and his own village in particular. It is his private affair more or less, and there is no spectacular ceremonial or large gathering of people at such times.

(*b*) A more complicated version of the ceremony takes place when the *bakabilo* assemble to purify the chief so that he may enter his own relic shrines with the 'wives of the relics' and the four senior *bakabilo*, and himself invoke the help of the tribal spirits there.

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769 796 In this case the chief is praying for the welfare of the territory as a whole, and, for instance, at a tree-cutting ceremony, he is described as cutting 'the trees of the land' (*imiti ya calo*), as distinct from just cutting his own trees. This form of the rite was apparently not performed annually, even in the past. It involved the gathering of thirty or forty priests and councillors, with their respective retinues, and could only be undertaken when the chief felt certain of the loyalty of these hereditary officials and had the means of feeding such a large gathering during several weeks.[1] For instance, the present Citimukulu incurred for some years the hostility of his *bakabilo*, principally the Cimba, and hence was unable to carry out the full rite for some time, a fact which certainly diminished his authority. It seems clear also that the great chiefs of the past were able to vary the form of the ritual on such tribal occasions by adding particular ceremonies as special demonstrations of their power. The special tree-cutting and sowing rites described on pp. 366–74 are cases in point. Old men now describe such rites as having been introduced by such and such a chief, and count the number of times they have been performed.

769 796 732 (*c*) A still more elaborate form of prayer to the spirits is the series of sacrifices known as the *ulupepo lukalamba*—'big sacrifice' at which offerings of cattle, chickens, beer, hoes, or cloth are made at all the big shrines in the land.[2] This series of rites usually coincides with the first-fruit ceremonies, and in fact it would be difficult to feed a big gathering of officials except at harvest time. The special *ukusumata* (or 'tasting') rite for the Kaffir corn is first performed (cf. p. 378) and then the Citikafula, the *makobilo* in charge of such sacrifices, should be sent with a basket of Kaffir-corn flour blessed at the relic shrines, and two oxen to the neighbouring shrines of Mulenga Porkili and Bwalya Cabala, the first royal ancestress. Here the beasts must be sacrificed and the flour scattered on the ground. This initiates the succession of sacrifices which are to follow. All the *bashimapepo* are called to the capital and are given cloth or chickens to offer at their local spirit centres, and messengers go to and fro between the different capitals to inform the territorial chiefs of the proceedings. They in their turn

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[1] The poverty of the modern chief and his inability to get tribute labour naturally makes it more and more difficult for him to organize tribal ceremonies of this kind.

[2] According to the degree of respect to which the dead chief is due.

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start to sacrifice at the sacred spots in their own districts. Only when the chain of sacrifices is complete the Bemba say '*Ulupepo lwabuka mu calo*' ('The sacrifice has risen up in the land'). The organization of such ceremonies on the large scale of former days can have been no mean feat in a territory as large and as sparsely populated as that of the Bemba. Formerly even Nkula of Icinga, some 100 miles from the Paramount's village, 'prayed with Citimukulu', but a subsequent estrangement between the two branches of the royal house has resulted in independent action at the present day, although the Nkula was still obliged in 1931 to send to ask for Citimukulu's help in the arrangement of a sacrifice at the royal burial grove when Icinga was short of rain. Shortage of supplies, and in particular of cattle, for sacrifices make it impossible for the rites to take place on such a wide scale as formerly, and in 1931 Chief Mwamba offered a beast at the Ngulu cave at Cilubula without simultaneous action by Citimukulu.

Such tribal ceremonies have only been organized from time to time by the Bemba chiefs. The last Citimukulu, Ponde, reigned only a few years and 'did not sacrifice at all' (*tapepa*), while Makumba, the previous Paramount, ordered the *ulupepo lukalamba* twice, Sampa, his predecessor, three times, &c., and Citapankwa 'many times'. It seems to have been undertaken either when some unusual disaster, such as a drought or a small-pox epidemic, was affecting the whole tribe, or alternatively, when the Citimukulu was in a particularly powerful position and wanted to demonstrate his strength. This he did by showing his power to provide beer, food, and sacrifices for his whole territory, and commanding the loyalty of all his councillors assembled for the meeting. He was the *mwine lupepo*, the owner, or host of the ceremony, just as a man distributing beer to his friends is the *mwine wa bwalwa* ('the owner of the beer'). The rite was also made the occasion of tribal council meetings (*ukuteke cilye*), and thus assumed great administrative importance as distinct from its political and economic function. To hold such a ceremony was a sign that the chief felt certain of his authority. No Citimukulu would undertake the *ulupepo lukalamba*, I was told, until he had been firmly settled on the throne for some years and had built two or three villages. Successful chieftainship, like successful headmanship, is a position that must be built up gradually through the forging of personal ties, and of a Citimukulu who had not attempted the big sacrifice I was told

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'He had not waited (lingered, dwelt) here long enough' (*Tabakokwele kuno pakalamba*). The present Paramount's attempt, only partially successful, to organize such a sacrifice in 1934 illustrated well the sort of motives that seem to have operated. He had reigned about ten years and was about to build what he described as his last village.[1] He had achieved an uneasy reconciliation with his *bakabilo* after their previous discontent and was thus enabled to count on their support for the ceremony; and the plague of locusts that had been decimating the land for two or three years and the simultaneous fall in the price of copper which restricted employment for his people made him decide that the 'land was hard' (*icalo nacikama*) and that the tribal spirits were refusing their blessings as a result of some years' neglect. It was one of the occasions of return to ritual previously abandoned which I have mentioned above.

These alternative ceremonies at the big chiefs' courts show the extent to which their economic function is linked with, and even dominated by, the political. The rites are associated with agricultural activities and sometimes follow a disaster threatening the land's prosperity, but they have greater significance as demonstrations of the chief's authority and supernatural qualities, on which beliefs the successful cultivation of the land ultimately depends.

The Morphology of the Rites.

The form of all these annual economic rites is strikingly similar. The same elements appear in each successive ceremony. They evidently reflect the people's basic beliefs as to the supernatural forces that control them and a number of their fundamental concepts, such as that of the magic power of sex, of fire, or of water. The double nature of the rites, both as enlisting the help of the ancestral spirits in particular economic enterprise and also in stressing the political authority associated with the ownership and cultivation of the land, is also clear. All the rites include:

(*a*) *The invocation of the imipashi.* The officiating priest makes request for some particular aid such as protection from the danger

[1] He told me 'Because I am adult now (fully grown) we shall settle down in this village now. They (the *bakabilo*) shall teach me all the old ceremonies' (*Ponto ninkulu. Tukekala ku mushi nomba. Bakamfunda fyonse fya kale*)—a sentence which expresses the Bemba conception that full supernatural powers are only acquired by the chief when he has reached age and success.

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of tree-cutting, which is the individual concern of all those present, but he also stresses the omnipotence of the *imipashi* by asking them for such blessings as life (*ubumi*), fertility, health, and peace. The form of the prayers is interesting. There is no fixed formula laid down, but it is absolutely essential that the spirits should each be mentioned by name. By this means their help is invoked. At a tribal ceremony I noticed that Citimukulu always prayed with one of his senior *bakabilo* at his elbow to prompt him if he forgot one ancestral title out of the twenty to thirty dead chiefs to be called upon, and for a chief even to mention the names of his ancestors when walking to a ceremony was described to me as a form of prayer (*ukulumbula*). Headmen also call their ancestors by name when invoking them. Then again it is important that the dead should be named as having taught the particular activity upon which the living are about to engage, and this is especially the case at the tribal ceremonies. In fact one of the chief functions of this type of prayer, is, I think, to give traditional sanction to the gardening methods now practised and to confirm the people's belief in them by tracing their origin to the past. The words of one or two such prayers will illustrate what I mean. For instance, Mwamba, when invoking the *imipashi* at the beginning of his tree-cutting ceremony, prayed: 'We have come to you Great Mwambas.[1] It was you who left us the land. We beg for the power to work in it in the way you showed us you worked in the place from which you came (i.e. Lubaland). And we ourselves began to learn (i.e. how to cut trees) when we were still children, until at last we found we had learnt the way. We followed (lit. fell into) your words' &c. . . .[2] (Here follows the prayer for safety and success with the tree-cutting.) A similar reference to the *imipashi*, as teaching agriculture, was made by one of the 'wives of the relics', who told me she took first-fruits to the shrines of the ancestors with the words, 'We show the owners (i.e. of the food) who brought it with them from Buluba.'[3] All such prayers seem to give validity to the present methods of cultivation, and to pledge the ancestors to help descendants who are thus following in their footsteps. The form

[1] *Ba*—the plural of respect and also the plural indicating the number of dead chiefs.

[2] *Twaiza kuli imwe BaMwamba. Ni imwe mwatushile calo. Tulelomba ukubomba imilimo, ifyo mwatulangile ifyo mwalecita uko mwatulile. Nga ifwe twatalika ukusambilila twacili baice, twasuka twasambilila. Twalipoonsa amashiwi yenu.*

[3] *Tulelanga abene abafumine nafyo ku Buluba.*

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of the prayer also emphasizes the right of the priest to officiate. He bases his claim to speak on lineage alone, and hence he usually calls the *imipashi* he is invoking by their kinship terms. For instance, some begin: 'You my mother's brothers and my grandfathers!' (*Mwe Bayama na Bashikuiu!*); and I have twice heard a chief add a separate prayer to 'Our mothers' (*Banyinefwe*), that is to say, the ancestresses of the royal line. By such means the claims of the living on the dead are publicly stated, and also the rights of the headman or chief to the office he holds.

(*b*) *The blessing of the objects used.* Besides the initial prayers at the different ceremonies the chief object to be used in the subsequent economic activity, such as the axe for the tree-cutting or the seeds for the sowing, must be blessed. This is achieved by bringing it in contact with the magic power of sex. The axe or the seeds are given potency by being placed at the head of the bed (*ku mutwe*) on which the officiating priest and his head wife have intercourse on the night before the rite takes place. The magic effects of such an act are difficult to explain without a full analysis of the Bemba ideas on sex, procreation, and their contagious effects on fire, sacred objects, and on certain human beings. Suffice it to say that the sexual act is thought to make the body hot (*umubili uakava*) and 'bad' (*ukuba ne fibi*),[1] and that the individual is then thought unfit to approach the ancestral spirits or to have contact with any sacred object such as the chiefs' relics, unless he has been ritually purified. But, nevertheless, an act of intercourse between a man and his head wife, followed by this special purification, is the means by which magic potency is conferred on the object placed at the head of the bed, and in some inexplicable way the blessing of the *imipashi* themselves is thereby invoked. Natives, who were usually shy in discussing the magic aspects of sex, would give in explanation some such phrase as '*Ni kufunge mipashi*' ('It is to soften or propitiate the spirits'), and one added that the reason why the chief had such power of blessing the axe or seeds was 'because of his chieftainship' (*ubufumu*, the abstract principle of chieftainship). And of the object blessed, another informant stated that new qualities had been conferred on it 'on account of the chieftainship, because the chief lies on top of it' (*umulandu ua*

[1] A condition expressed by a number of technical terms such as *ukutetema* (to be ritually impure) or by euphemisms such as *ukuba na kantu* (to have some little thing wrong with you).

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bufumu ico mfumu ilelalapo). The whole of this conception must be considered against the background of the people's belief in the supernatural powers of their chiefs, and the influence of his sexual capacities on the fertility of the land.[1]

(*c*) *The purification of the priest.* Since sex intercourse makes it impossible to approach the *imipashi* or to enter their shrines, the ritual purification of the officiating priest and his wife, after the blessing of the axe or seeds, is an essential act in each economic rite. It is one which is performed before every solemn prayer or sacrifice to the *imipashi*, before the founding of a new village, an inheritance ceremony, a death or the birth of twins, &c., either by the chief, the headman, or the commoner, as the case may be. In the case of a commoner or an ordinary headman, this rite of purification (*ukuwamya umubili*) is simple. The morning after the sexual act, the couple set on the fire the woman's marriage pot—a tiny clay pot made for her by her paternal aunt on her marriage—and they heat water in it. This the wife then pours over her husband's hands. Both then bathe in the river and return to the village, after which new fire must be lighted in the hut. Sex taboos are kept by the pair until the ceremony in question is over. In the case of the chief, and particularly the Citimukulu, this rite is, however, exceedingly complex. It involves the simultaneous ritual intercourse of the chief and the 'wife of the land' (*umukolo ua calo*), and the Cimba and the Cikutwe with their respective head wives in huts built specially for the purpose. Afterwards twelve or fifteen of the *bakabilo* must assist, each with his own hereditary part, in the purification ceremony and the lighting of the new fire. Without purifying his body the chief can never enter his *benye* house or use his powers over the land to the full, but the complication and expense of a rite which requires the simultaneous presence of so many officials is one of the reasons why the full ceremonial of tree-cutting or first-fruits described later is so rarely performed nowadays, when chiefs are impoverished and cannot always command the loyalty of their *bakabilo*.

(*d*) *The divination rite.* Except in the case of first-fruit rites, each ceremony, whether tree-cutting or blessing of seeds, is followed by some act of divination in which the intentions of the *imipashi* are revealed to their descendants. Here the element of individual doubt and uncertainty is apparent again. There are

[1] Cf. p. 249.

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769 771 787 796 several methods of divination used. The blessing of the object is itself a preliminary test of the kind since the dreams of the officiating priest as he lies, with the axe or the seeds at the head of his bed, are taken as omens. 'When you have fallen asleep the *imipashi* come to you and you dream good things. If you dream bad things you will not succeed.'[1] The dreams of a chief on this or other occasions are very important for the land. But additional divination rites are sometimes added, particularly in the case of tree-cutting. Hunting ordeals commonly follow the tree-cutting ceremonies, especially in Bisa country, and Citimukulu sent out a man with a gun and a couple of cartridges to try the luck of the land after his *ukutema* ceremony in 1934. The people are delighted and unusually sure of success if a female animal is killed, and say, 'We have found a grindstone' (*twasange libwe*), while if a male animal is killed, that is nearly as good an omen and is described as finding an axe (the man's food-producing implement). If no animal is seen at the nets then the tree-cutting goes on, but without the same hopes of good fortune. 'We go to try to see if we are going to work well' is a typical description of the procedure, and the whole use of the divination rite reflects the anxieties and hazards of traditional agricultural processes already described.

The Economic Cycle.

769 796 This analysis of the main elements of the Bemba agricultural ritual must lead to a description of the individual ceremonies and the extent to which they were still performed:

(*a*) *The tree-cutting rite.* In old-fashioned villages the headman performs the tree-cutting ceremony with all the inhabitants of the village accompanying him. In modern communities he tends to do the rite alone, or with his near relatives only, while the rest rely on such magic charms as they possess for their protection, and are described as 'cutting trees anyhow' (*cikomekome*). The older form of the rite will be described, since it is still performed in however abbreviated a version in the majority of Bemba communities. In such settlements the headman, when he has decided to begin the clearing of the bush and fixed the site of his garden, calls the elders of the village and his own immediate relatives to

[1] *Nga mulala mipashi isuma iaisa, mwalota fisuma. Mulote ifishiweme, fishilungama.* (Bad dreams are those concerning snakes, lions, fire, &c.)

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his hut in the evening. Here they sit on the floor in silence while he prays to the *imipashi* for blessing on the next day's work. Both in the six texts I collected during the course of actual ceremonies and in a number of others I took down from informants, the same requests were made. The spirits are asked to protect the tree-cutters when they climb, to give food as the result of clearing the bush, to free the people from illness, and to give them children and peace. Mwamba's prayer on the night before the ceremony is a good example: 'You, our Spirits, now we want food. You help us mightily to cut the trees with vigour. That is food! Tomorrow I shall go and cut the tree branches. He who climbs the trees let the soles of his feet stick to the tree-trunk, and let dead wood fall to the ground only; and all the snakes that come out of hollow stems let them run into their holes; and so also the wasps that may swarm out of the tree. And then another thing! Those locusts that are here in the land, it would be good if you kept them far away, because if those locusts eat the food of we human beings so that there is nothing left to eat, then we shall all die of hunger. And then if we die of hunger, there will be no one left to praise you, you Spirits.'[1] Prayers said by an ordinary headman tended to be simpler, but made the same requests. All such rites of blessing are described commonly by the older men as 'begging for an axe' (*ukulombe sembe*).

During the prayers the headman's axe lies on the floor of his hut in the centre of the group of kinsmen. At night it is put at the head of his bed. In the morning the purification ceremony is performed by the headman and his wife before the village is awake, and then the same elders assemble in the hut to pray for further blessings on the day's work. After this the rest of the villagers gather together and the whole party goes off to the site of the headman's new *icitemene*. At this juncture the element of doubt as to the choice of the patch to be cleared is first manifested. The trees must be blessed as well as the axe, that is to say the productivity of the soil must be assured by supernatural help as well as

[1] *Mwe mipashi, nomba tulefwaye cakulya. Mutwafwilishye ukukoma na maka. E kulya! Mailo nkesa kukuteme miti. Ulenina ku miti lukasa lukambate miti ne cileka conse cipone panshi ceka; ne nsoka shyonse shifume ku mpako, shingile kumendo; na malonda yafume ku miti. Kabili fimakanta filya fyaisa muno calo, cilingile ukuti mwafitandula ukutali, pantu fimakanta filya nga fyalya filyo fya fwe bantu, tapali cakulya. Ukuti bonse twafwe ku nsala. Nomba nga twafwa ku nsala tapali sa kumulumbula, mwe mipashi.* (Mwamba's village, 13. v. 33.)

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the safety of the workers. For this purpose the first tree (usually an *umufungo* tree)[1] is ritually cut, preferably by a grandson of the headman, who sits on the ground meanwhile and again invokes the *imipashi*, in much the same terms as before. The chopping of the first tree with the blessed axe is the signal for the beginning of the work, and the villagers swarm up the trees shouting their *ukutema* cries (cf. p. 291).

A third invocation of the spirits takes place in the evening, when thanks must be returned to the spirits for their help. This ceremony is known in the capital as 'to return the work' (*ukubweshye milimo*), or 'to return thanks for the food-basket' (*ukulubulo lupe*), but merely as 'to ask a blessing' (*ukupala*) in a commoner's village. This time the spirits are told that every one is safely home from the tree-cutting. They are begged to continue their help during the year.

The following day is kept as a day of rest on which the spirits are supposed to come and continue the work begun by their descendants. I never met a native who genuinely expected to find additional cut branches on the ground next day, but many of them spoke of the custom in a reverent way, and only the chief, Mukuikile, something of a sceptic after many years spent as a cook in a European household in Livingstone, said outright with a quizzical smile: 'We say "Let the spirits cut the trees there" (i.e. on the site). But they don't ever lop off any branches. At least we have never seen it. They make fools of us! We have never been there when it happens.'[2] Nevertheless, the day of rest is generally kept, and in some parts of the country this day is used for the hunting test already mentioned.

At the capitals the tree-cutting ceremonies are similar to those in the villages, with the exception that the axe used for the ritual cutting must be forged new for the purpose, and that it must lie overnight in the chief's *benye* shrine instead of at the head of his bed. But the whole rite is, of course, invested with greater solemnity and pomp, at any rate when 'the trees of the land' are cut.[3] At the ceremonies I saw, both at Citimukulu's and at

[1] E. B. H. Goodall points out that *ukufunga* means to propitiate or bless (op. cit., p. 28).

[2] *Tuleti mipashi itemako. Nomba tabalelwishye miti. Tatumweneko. Baletucito bulwelelwele! Tatusangapo!* (Mukuikile, ix. 33.)

[3] The full ceremony at which the *bakabilo* are present and the *benye* shrines entered (cf. p. 360).

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Paramount Chief going to tree-cutting ceremony. Tree-cutting ceremony, Citimukulu's village, 1933. Note the Chief in patterned cloth in centre and procession of villagers armed with bows and guns.

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Mwamba's villages in 1933, I was impressed with the seriousness and reverence of the prayers offered by the chief on the night before the tree-cutting. Citimukulu sat inside one of his ceremonial huts with the most important *bakabilo* around him, his head wife opposite, and the new axe lying in one of the big court eating-baskets wrapped in the length of calico to be given to the spirits. The chief began suddenly to pray, calling out the names of about twenty ancestors, prompted by the Citikafula who sat next him. He asked for the blessing on the work and for peace and well-being. After the words had been said the *bakabilo* took the axe and cloth, and walked quickly to the *benye* shrines with four wrinkled old women—the 'wives of the relics' hobbling behind to unbar the log barricades of the sacred huts. They disappeared inside, followed by the chief *bakabilo*,[1] while the rest of the party crouched on the ground outside, clapping as a sign of respect. Then all returned to make obeisance on the ground outside the chief's hut, each *mukabilo* rolling on his back in turn while his ceremonial name was shouted by his fellows with more clapping of the hands. This alternating obeisance to the dead chiefs at the *beni* huts and to their living representatives in front of the royal dwelling is characteristic of all the Bemba court ritual.

Next morning, before dawn, the chief's big wooden war-drum (*icinkumbi*) began to sound, and his court-singers and praisers (*balukaluka*) stood up on the mound behind his enclosure shouting praise-songs and calling to the people. Every one gathered round excitedly. Citimukulu appeared from his hut with his ceremonial axe over one shoulder. He was hoisted on to a servant's back and set off down the path, while his wives knelt on either side giving the ululation salute. The rest of the party then set off at the double, drums going, rattles shaking, the blind singer wailing, and the children of the village running ahead shrieking with delight. The blessed axe was carried in front of the chief by one of his courtiers and his hereditary bow by another. It was a gay and animated scene. Citimukulu was greeted with shouts and obeisance at each group of huts we passed in a two-hour walk, or rather run. Once arrived at the tree-cutting site, a small sapling

[1] Technically speaking, only the Cimba, Munuca, Citikafula, Katenda, Mulombwelua can enter the *benye* shrines with the *bamukabenye*, but a quarrel between the Citimukulu and the Cimba had prevented the latter attending to purify the chief, and therefore the latter could not enter his own relic shrine, and the Munuca remained away as a sign of protest.

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umufungo was quickly selected by the *bakabilo*, and Citimukulu sat down beside it praying yet again to the tribal *imipashi* by name and adding, 'Give us work! Let the axe cut cleanly through the trees (i.e. not slip). And the people let them not fall, no! May they not cut themselves with their axes! And then another thing, you great chiefs, now that the locusts have come they are eating the food. You help us! You chase them away!'[1] Then there followed a discussion with the local headman as to whether some other chief's spirit should be called upon, and the name of one of the first Mwambas (Amansenga), said to have died upon this very spot, was remembered. Then the prayers began again while Citimukulu's grandson knelt by the chosen sapling, axe in hand, waiting to chop: 'We have come to look for porridge. You help us with the work. May we all eat and be satisfied! May we fill our granaries to the brim. Now the locusts have come, you our ancestors help us. You the spirits of the land help us, you who died in this country. Let not the axe cut the people, and may their feet grip firmly onto the tree. To fall is bad! You our spirits, help us. May the food be crammed into our granaries tightly.'[2] As the words ceased, the royal grandson cut down the *umufungo* with a stroke, and the young men present began to climb the trees. They worked half the day, and returned in a triumphant, if weary, procession, the chief being greeted with the shouts used for returning warriors at his village outskirts, or the more usual salutation, *Mwakomene!* (i.e. 'You have cut').

In the evening the chief himself went to return thanks at the *benye* shrine to the beating of the *icinkumbi* drum. The *bamukabenye* opened the doors of the huts and sat each side of the specially raised door-step, while Citimukulu slowly lowered his great bulk to the ground and rolled on his back before his ancestors' shrine as his people do to him. This is the *ukulubulo lupe* or *kubweshya lupe*—the return of thanks. After it came the day of rest, filled in this instance with excited preparations for Citimukulu's move to

[1] *Tupeni milimo! Isembe ilungame mu muti! Abantu tekuti bapone, yo! Belakoma ne sembe. Kabili, mwe shyamfumu, nomba fimakanta fyaisa filelya fyakulya. Mutwafweko! Mufitamfye! . . .*

[2] *Twaisa ku kufwayo bwali. Mutwafweko milimo. Tuleikuta bonse! Tuleisushya amatala! Nomba fimakanta nafisa, mwe mipashi twafweko. Bashimatongo twafweko, mwe bafwile mwi calo. Isembe tailekoma bantu, no lukasa luleikata ku muti. Cakupona cabipa! Mwe mipashi yonse twafweko. Filepaka ku butala.* (Citimukulu, 3. iv. 33.) The present Citimukulu is not an eloquent man, and this prayer was much less poetical than some I heard uttered by Mwamba and the late Nkula.

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the bush. This is a definite stage in the year's activities. The chief and his court move to temporary grass huts (*nsaluse*) built near the new *icitemene*, and here they live for a month or more, watching the garden-work, calling up tribute labour, and conducting the business of the tribe while seated at the edge of the garden site. Thus the phrase 'the chief has gone to the grass shelters' (*mfumu yaya ku nsaluse*) denotes a definite change in court life. In the old days a special official, Mulewa Cimfwembe, who was responsible for carrying the blessed axe to the tree-cutting ceremony, lived apart in a grass hut, keeping sex taboos, and levying dues on all the animals killed by the hunters in the neighbourhood, until the time came to fire the Paramount's gardens. He was described as 'watching the trees of the country' (*ukulindila miti ya calo*), and was highly rewarded by the chiefs for his services. But the Paramount's own move out into the bush seemed to me to have no ritual purpose, but rather an administrative one.

In the old days it can be seen that the *ukutema* rite at the capital must have had an important effect on the whole process of clearing the bush. With its sacred ceremony at the royal relic-house, its procession of drums and singers and tree-cutters into the bush, and its assembly of the notables of the district, the day must have given a terrific impetus to the work of the whole *icalo*. Besides this, it provided a large labour force for communal work on the royal garden and was associated with the transaction of tribal business by the *bakabilo* summoned to the capital. Even nowadays some of the inspiriting results of the rite can be seen, even though the ceremony seems to be a shadow of its former magnificence. The present Citimukulu's cutting of 'the trees of the land' in 1934, after a lapse of some years, certainly raised the enthusiasm and hope of the people. The ceremony was discussed in the neighbouring villages through which I happened to be travelling both before and afterwards. The statement that 'They' (the royal plural) had prayed, and that the chief was making big gardens this year, seemed to cause pleasure and to give encouragement. It meant fuller granaries at the capital, and therefore more food for the councillors and tribute labourers, but also, I judged from the reverent tone used, the coming of good luck—a return to the 'good old days' when the *imipashi* blessed the people, according to the popular legend, and everything went well.

As a contrast, it is worth considering conditions in the village of

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Mwamba, the second greatest Bemba chief but one, who lives about ten miles from the white centre of Kasama, where his young men go to work. Here I also saw an *ukutema* rite, but only the old men participated. The boys looked derisively on while the chief made obeisance before his ancestors' shrines, and they only joined the subsequent tree-cutting reluctantly because they were interested by my presence and wanted to have the right to drink the beer provided for the workers on their return. These were youths who despised agriculture as a pursuit fit only for the old, and laughed at everything commonly known as 'the things of the past' (*ifintu fyu kale*.) Their conduct distressed the old men exceedingly, and the comments passed with shrugs and in asides were instructive. They showed the complete association in the Bemba mind between the chief's political authority and his power of blessing. If Mwamba had been a 'great chief', the argument ran, he would have been able to control his men. That he was not showed that the spirits did not favour him and that the land had gone 'hard'. It was hardly likely that the royal garden would prosper, therefore, or, of course, the rest of the *icalo*. Elsewhere individuals still seemed to pray to the *imipashi* before tree-cutting, although some Roman Catholics have begun to cross themselves instead, or as well, but the integrating function of the chief's or headman's ceremony is evidently very much decreased.

(*b*) *Firing the gardens.* The firing of the piled branches, the next act of the economic year, is also ritualized, but the ceremonial is not public in any sense, either at the capital or in an ordinary village, and most commoners were unable to give me an account of what happened at the firing of the chief's gardens. In this instance they wait for the *mfumu's* signal to fire their gardens, but not for news of the ceremony performed then. The rite depends on the Bemba belief in the danger of contaminated fire, that is to say, fire that has been touched by any one ceremonially impure. If such fire is considered harmful to the life of a young child, or a chief, and a bar to any approach to the *imipashi*, it is not unnatural that the people should believe it necessary to light their branch piles with new fire, that is to say, made with fire-sticks or matches. A commoner whom I saw fire his gardens, brought matches, lit a torch of grass, spat into the air, and cried out, 'Now you fire burn well, and let us go in peace.'[1] A headman should purify himself

[1] *We mulilo ulepyafye cisuma! Tuende no mutende!*

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Sacred relic shrine at Mwamba's village. Note the elephant tusks piled in front of the door.

Shrine built on the site of a dead chieftainess's hut. Mukukamfumu, 1931. Note the red cloth offering hung inside.

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and light new fire in his hut before going out to fire his garden, an act for which the other villagers wait, but do not participate in. At the capital the headman of the village (*umwine mushi*), an official with entirely ritual functions and placed in charge of one of the chief's sacred fires, must extinguish his own fire overnight, borrow new fire from a second sacred hearth in the morning, purify himself with the aid of his wife, and go out with a glowing cinder of the royal fire to light the gardens. I never saw this rite carried out at the capital, and its privacy, as in the case of all ceremonial appertaining to the chief's fire, was stressed. The ritualizing of this particular economic process seemed to me to depend on the beliefs in the nature of fire and its sacred properties rather than on anything connected with the agricultural activity itself.

(*c*) *Sowing ceremonies.* Among the Bemba sowing ceremonies are insignificant compared to the tree-cutting rites. The staple millet seeds are not blessed at all, although they are doctored usually with the *icibyalilo* magic. Prayers are only offered to the *imipashi* in the case of subsidiary crops, and not by any means for all of these. Pumpkins, cow-peas, Livingstone potatoes, Kaffir corn, maize, and the *amankolobwe* are those usually given as the list.[1] Of course, the ritual may have been fuller in the old days. The Bisa and the Ushi describe a ceremony similar to those of a number of the Southern Bantu, in which the headman or the chief blesses or doctors handfuls of seeds given him by each of the women of the community, and these specially treated seeds are mixed with the rest to be sown. But among the Bemba I only collected one account of a rite of this sort. The *bakabilo* tell of a sowing ceremony at the Paramount's court following the special tree-cutting rite performed by Mulewa Cimfwembe in the old days (cf. p. 371). They say that after the latter had 'watched the trees of the land', and fire had been set to the royal garden, another hereditary official, the Kamenge, took his place to watch the freshly sown seeds until the ripening of the crop. He also kept sex taboos and lived apart in a grass shelter during this time. This act was known as 'watching the seeds of the chief'. It has evidently not been performed for two reigns at least. Another lost sowing

[1] Compare the list of crops for which the first-fruit rites are performed. It will be seen that Junod's suggestion that such rites remain associated with the older African crops is largely borne out (cf. p. 20), but maize is, of course, a more recent introduction, possibly included as it is sown and also ripens at the same time as most of the others listed above.

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rite was connected with one of the most sacred of the Paramount's *babenye*, a girdle made of the skin cut from the abdomen of a legendary figure, Mwase, said to have been killed for committing adultery with the Citimukulu's wife. It has now long since rotted away, but living men tell of occasions when the relic was taken from the *benye* house, bound round the waist of a young virgin, the maternal niece of Munuca, the greatest *mukabilo*. The girl then danced across the garden of the chief, scattering blessed sorghum seeds broadcast, while the Citimukulu and his *bakabilo* followed behind. This story, always told with great delight, seemed to me a sign that the sowing rites must have had greater importance formerly than at the present day.

Nowadays, the blessing of the seeds at a commoner's village is done in typical fashion by standing them in a calabash at the end of the headman's bed. In the morning, after the usual purification ceremony, they are sown in the headman's garden, all the villagers coming to help.[1] But I never saw such a rite performed myself, and I noticed that some natives were doubtful as to which seeds actually had to be blessed. For instance, of 10 informants, all gave pumpkins in their list, 8 Livingstone potatoes, 7 Kaffir corn, 6 maize, 5 *amankolobwe*. At the capitals, however, the sowing rites still persist. At Nkula's village in 1930 Kaffir-corn seeds in a huge gourd were stood overnight in the *benye* house and were sown next day on the chief's *mputa* by all the women of the village. The sowing ceremonies evidently used to give the people a sign when to start planting their crops, a matter on which skilled guidance is often needed, but it is doubtful whether they were ever occasions of big tribal gatherings of rejoicing as in the case of tree-cutting or harvest rites.

(*d*) *First-fruit ceremonies.* Some form of first-fruits ceremony seems to be performed in all typical Bantu societies, and in these there are certain common elements recognizable. But the symbolism of these rites is often exceedingly complex, and varies widely from area to area. The ceremonies also tend to become the occasion of big tribal gatherings such as the army rites of the Zulu since they inevitably occur at the plentiful season of the

[1] One informant told me his father, a headman, always blessed the seeds of all the villagers and gave them each a handful to mix with their crops, but in most instances now it seems that the headman merely blesses and sows his own seeds. In Bisa districts, such as that near Shiwa Ndola, the original form of the rite seems to be more often adhered to.

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year. This combination of functions makes the question of interpretation even more difficult.

Some writers have described the ceremonies as being essentially a ritual which marks the change of the season and the beginning of new forms of social activity. Thus Bryant calls the Zulu rite *umkosi*, 'the stepping into the year', and Junod describes the complex *luma* ceremonies of the Thonga as typical *rites de passage*.[1] Of course, the harvest in any of these societies does actually mean a complete change in ordinary village life, but among the Bemba I heard no specific statement of this fact in any of the explanations of the ritual, nor is there any great ceremony of public rejoicing at the time except on occasions when a special harvest rite is carried out at the capital, or when the *ukupepo lukalamba* has been initiated. But the element of risk, thought to be associated with the beginning of the new food-supply, is prominent here as it is in other Bantu societies. The Thonga, according to Junod, consider that there is some magic danger attached to the eating of the new grain, and the name of the ceremony—*luma*—comes from *ukuluma*, 'to bite'. He suggests the taboo on the new food may be due, in part, to fear of quarrelling—which is an actual risk when beer starts to flow freely—or to a desire to avoid jealousy by preventing one man from beginning his new supplies before his neighbours are able to do so.[2] The doctoring of the chief against this danger of eating the new foods and the various rites designed to remove the taboo on the new harvest occur again and again throughout this southern area.

Among the Bemba I never heard a native state that there was any magic danger attached to eating the new food, and the name of the rite, *ukupoosela* (to offer or place in front of some one), describes the essential element in their first-fruits—the recognition of the prerogatives of chief and ancestral spirits which will be described below. But it is evidently considered important that each crop should be ritually treated immediately the first specimen in any district ripens. There is no waiting till the end of the harvest for the ceremony. In fact it is reckoned so necessary to

[1] A. T. Bryant, *Zulu-English Dictionary*, 1905; H. Junod, *The Life of a South African Tribe*, 1929, vol. i, pp. 394–404.

[2] Cf. Junod, loc. cit., p. 394. *Report of the Commission on Native Law and Custom*, 1883, pp. 525–6 and 531–2. Cf. also M. Gluckmann, 'First-fruit Ceremonies of South-Eastern Bantu', *Africa*, vol. xi, no. 1, p. 34, for stress on the danger of quarrelling at harvest, and for other interesting interpretations of the Zulu ritual.

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'offer' each crop as soon as it becomes edible that three separate ceremonies are performed for the different new foods, rather than that either should be postponed till the time of the main harvest. Thus pumpkins, Livingstone potatoes, and maize, which are the first to ripen, are offered to the spirits together, then *musangwe*, the quick-growing millet, then Kaffir corn, cow-peas, and *amasokolobwe*.[1] Asked what would happen if a man began to eat his own new crops before the ceremony had begun, most natives merely said that it was bad to eat *cilyelye*, 'anyhow', i.e. without the right ceremony or etiquette, but two or three added that a man would be angry if he saw his neighbour eating new millet before he had any himself, and that this would be bad. The Bemba thus express a fear somewhat similar to that of the Thonga. But the ultimate dread is evidently that of angering the spirits and not fellow men, and older Bemba told me that failure to perform the ceremony means that the land is 'hard', lions catch the people, snakes bite them, and they fall off the trees, and that game becomes scarce—all evils believed to follow an injury to the spirits or a failure to give a living chief his due.

This brings us, I think, to another aspect of the ceremony which is prominent in most Bantu first-fruit rites, that is to say, the symbolic recognition of the prerogatives of the owners of the land, the chief and his dead ancestors. In some areas the chief is given special tribute at harvest, or beer is brewed for him when he travels the country. Alternatively his rights are proved by a ritual testing of the new food followed by his family, the tribal councillors, or the elders, all tasting in order of precedence.[2] Among the Nguni peoples the chief in his turn symbolizes his function as the giver by breaking a gourd and scattering the new food over the assembled peoples.[3]

Among the Bemba, this recognition of the rights of the living or dead chiefs at the time of harvest is the central act of the ceremony. In fact one man, asked why it was bad to eat the new food

[1] Has this series of ceremonies any similarity to the distinction made by Kidd between the little festival, when green crops are offered, and the great festival which follows it when grain is ritually treated, among the S. E. Bantu? Kidd, *The Essential Kafir*, 1925, p. 269.

[2] e.g. in Bechuanaland. Willoughby, *Soul of the Bantu*, 1928, p. 229: among the Thonga, Junod, op. cit., vol. i, p. 394.

[3] Kidd, loc. cit.; T. Shooter, *The Kafirs of Natal and the Zulu Country*, 1857, pp. 26–7, 292.

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without offering it to the dead, exclaimed: 'It is a crime. It is to steal';[1] and one of the 'Wives of the Relics' prayed at Mwamba's court: 'You Spirits, the people are eating your food gluttonously. They are eating your food without respect. We ask for mercy!...'[2] In the simplest cases, merely to show the new crop (*ukulanga*) to the headman is enough. This I saw done once when a handful of self-sown millet ripened early in the garden. It was not considered a real crop, but the woman who brought her basket to the headman said she did it 'just to show it because Lesa gave it to us. It was just a case of luck.'[3] In the case of the planted crops, however, the first head of grain to ripen or gourd that swells must be brought by its owner to the headman, and the latter blesses it in the usual way, places it at the end of his bed at night, and lastly carries it to the village *ulufuba* or spirit shrine, where it is given to the spirits. When the first new gourds are ripening it is common to see slices of pumpkin exposed in every tiny shrine when travelling from village to village. In the case of *mwangwe*, the headman's wife sometimes makes a dough (*umufuba*) of the new flour, and this is carried by a small boy to the *ulufuba*. All these are the rites known as *ukuposela*. At such ceremonies the priest apparently asks for nothing concrete. He merely, as he says, shows the food to the *imipashi* whose property it ultimately is, and tells them baldly that the food is now ripe. A prayer I heard was as follows: 'We have eaten the new food! May we go in peace! The new food is ripe now. We want to eat it now!'[4]

No tribute is given to the living chief at this time, although of course he gets more beer and grain at harvest time than any other. But the conception that tribute is due to the chief in virtue of his ownership of the land, seems to me to be reflected in the idea that ritual offerings must be made to the spirits at harvest time. The resemblance even extends to the belief that just as a man who gets an unusually good haul of fish or kills much game is bound to give a share to the chief, so when there is an unusually good harvest, it is necessary that a special offering should be made to the

[1] *Ni bupalamushi—Ni kuiba.*

[2] *Mwe shyamfumu! bantu balefumuka fyakulya fyenu. Nabalye fyakulya fyenu cilyelye. Twapapata!*

[3] *Kulangafye, ico Lesa atupele. Ni kushyukafye.* Self-sown Kaffir corn can be eaten without a ceremony among the Bamangwato. Willoughby, op. cit., p. 234.

[4] *Twalye 'cilyo cipya. Tuende no mutende! Fyakulya fipya mu calo. Tulefwaya tulye!*

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spirits, and even when the foods of the bush—caterpillars, mushrooms, or ants—are very plentiful, a special *mukabilo* (Munuca) performs an *ukuposela* ceremony to offer 'the owners of the land' the fruits of the bush 'because they have given us a lot this year'.

At the capital, according to the usual custom, the new foods are exposed in the *benye* house instead of being placed at the end of the headman's bed. They are afterwards cooked in the *kamitembo*, the sacred kitchen (cf. p. 148), and then ritually tasted by the chief, his children, and the *bamukabenye*. This is the act known as *ukusumata*, 'to taste', as distinct from *ukuposela*, 'to offer'. It was possibly done in commoners' villages formerly, but now only at the chief's court.

A more impressive form of the *ukusumata* takes place at times of great plenty at the capital,[1] when beer made from the new Kaffir corn is ritually tasted by the chief and all his *bakabilo*—a symbolic presentation of the hierarchical order of Bemba society. For this special rite (*ukusumata masaka*) the *bakabilo* must be summoned, and the chief purified. Beer is first brewed by the head wife in the *kamitembo*, and after purification the Paramount and his wife sleep here, keeping sex taboos till the beer is brewed. This is known as *ukulindilo musunga*, 'to watch for the yeast'.[2] During this time flour made from the new crop has been exposed in the *benye* house for the blessing of the *imipashi*, and some of this is then sprinkled on the sacred beer, to be drunk by the Paramount and the chief *bakabilo* inside the *benye* house, and by the rest in order of seniority outside. After this, the Munuca rubs some of the sacred flour on the chests of the *bakabilo* present, and thus makes them free to celebrate first-fruit rites of their own in their own villages. Later a basket must be carried to the shrines of Kafula, a chief who died of smallpox and was therefore buried alone near the present capital. If liked, the *ulupepo lukalamba* can then begin. Such a ceremony is obviously one of the elaborate alternative forms of the economic rites described above. It was performed apparently three times in Sampa's reign and three times in Cikwanda's. The present Citi-

[1] 'When the land is boiling over'—*Icalo calilobila*.

[2] Compare the function of the Mulemba Cimfwembe in 'watching the trees of the land' and of the Kamenge in 'watching the chief's seeds'. The *cishiku*, the lighter of the chief's sacred fire, has also to 'watch' the new fire when a village is being built. There seems to me some protective power in the presence of a man keeping sex taboos.

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Harvest ceremony. Bringing beer to the chiefs. Npika district, 1933. Note beer in gourd and man about to roll on his back to salute the dread chiefs.

Shrines to ancestral spirits built outside a village.

[facing p. 378]

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mukulu tried to organize it again in 1933, but hunger forced his wives to eat up the supply of Kaffir corn he had planted for the purpose, and he was never able to collect sufficient grain to make the beer.

(*e*) *Thanksgiving rites.* In Bisa districts a special rite of thanksgiving as distinct from the *ukuposela* is performed in August to September or after the main millet harvest has been reaped. This is known as *ukupelo bwalua kuli mfumu*, 'to give the (dead) chiefs beer'. For instance, near Shiwa Ngandu in August 1933 I found special fire-stands (*amafwasa*) had been built in the open near three village spirit shrines especially for the heating of water for this beer. The villagers gathered round the shrines, men one side and women the other, and the headman began to call on the chiefs of the land: 'You, Sir Matipa, Sir Maluma Lubande, you, the owner of the chiefs of the Bisa. You know your companions, all the other chiefs. Call them that they come to drink our beer. We have come to pray for life. Make us go in peace. We have brewed beer. We have brought it to you to honour you. And then we beg for peace. May we eat food! We pray for porridge. May the blood of animals be seen too! Save us from the locusts'—a pause—'Now I have finished.'

After this the wife of the headman poured hot water on the big gourd of beer standing by the spirit hut and she drank, afterwards rolling on the ground in the royal salute 'because she was the owner who brewed the beer' (*ni mwine ualongo bwalua*). She was followed by the rest of the village in order of age,[1] and dancing and singing began round the shrines, each performer rolling on the ground as to a chief.

Such a ceremonial drinking at the spirit shrines may have been much more common in all Bemba villages formerly. I have heard of it happening after a hunt at the nets, and have seen gourd beer-dippers lying in spirit shrines ready for a beer drink. But in this Bisa district, harvest ceremonies of this kind are performed to this day, and they are followed in some cases by a ritual hunt to discover the will of the spirits.

All such harvest or first-fruit rites must be considered as a means of sacralizing the gathering of the new harvest, encouraging the community to handle the essential food supplies with reverence, or emphasizing, as Radcliffe-Browne would say, its 'social

[1] Except the headman, who may only drink in the village.

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769 796 value'. But in Bemba society the ritual stress on the legal and political prerogatives of the chief is also prominent at the first-fruits ceremonies, and the harvest, as well as the tree-cutting, can be made the occasion of a big display of the Paramount's power.

(*f*) *Rain ritual.* Prayers for rain are rarely necessary in this area as the supply is usually ample, but when they occur the Citimukulu is alone responsible. I never heard of a territorial chief or a headman praying for rain, or an *yanga* asked to provide it by magic. The only means of obtaining rain is apparently to send an ox to the chiefs' burial grove in charge of one of the royal undertakers, and the ShiMwalule there sacrifices the beast at the shrine in the grove. One such sacrifice was apparently performed in 1930.

771 182 To conclude, the magico-religious rites of the Bemba were certainly an integral part of their whole economic system. The ceremonies gave an impetus to their ordinary agricultural activities, and enabled the chief to organize their efforts more effectively, and thus to support the whole machinery of tribal government. The performance of the ritual constantly emphasized the supernatural powers of the chief, both in his own person and by his right of access to the tribal spirits. On this deeply-seated belief in the attributes of their *mfumu*, economic incentives and the use of land ultimately depended. It is this faith which has been weakened nowadays with pronounced effects on the whole morale of the tribe, as far as agriculture is concerned. How far Christian ritual has taken the place of the old agricultural ceremonies I do not know. I have seen natives cross themselves before tree-cutting and sowing, and I believe that some missions hold church services for the blessing of the seeds, but it will remain a fact that the old Bemba ceremonial of ancestor worship put the control of the religious rites into the hands of the political and administrative authority of the tribe, while those of the Christian churches do not, and cannot, do the same, since no big chiefs have yet accepted Christianity.

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105 No cash crop had been introduced in the area at the time I studied it. In order to get a cash income Bemba men left the territory to look for work in the mining areas to the south. Between 40 and 60 per cent of males were absent from the area in 1931. Although this phenomenon probably only dates from the nineteen twenties it has already had such marked effects on the marriage system of the Bemba that it is reflected in the chisungu rite.

The environment of the Bemba is also responsible for those health conditions which are the source of many of their anxieties. Malaria is endemic and the figures for pulmonary disease were very high during my visit. The mortality of children of under three years of age was very severe. This was thought by medical experts to be due to the fact that children had no milk at all after they were weaned, usually between their second and third year; also to infections resulting in dysentery. Death in childbirth was not uncommon. Girls seemed to bear their first child immediately after puberty, at about 15 or 16 years. They received little skilled care either before or after childbirth, and the wide dispersal of the villages made it difficult for the Government to provide European medical facilities. The traditional processes of delivery were exhausting in the extreme to the mother and it was almost impossible for a Bemba midwife to secure conditions that her European counterpart would consider clean.

Bemba women seemed to accept the period of food shortage to which they had become accustomed but they were obsessed with the risks that their children ran and their magic was very largely concerned with rites designed to save their babies' health. The chisungu ceremony is a case in point.

IDEOLOGY AND DOGMA

769 The Bemba attribute their blessings and misfortunes to super-
775 natural agencies, which are set in motion either by persons, dead
789 or living, or by impersonal magic forces, good or evil. They do not believe in the dogma of chance.[1]

769 (*a*) The Personal beings include: (i) *the spirits of ancestors*
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[1] I owe this term to Godfrey and Monica Wilson, *The Analysis of Social Change*, 1945.

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(*mipashi*) mainly of the matrilineal line, which can be addressed at spirit shrines, the burial places of dead chiefs or in the huts of their individual descendants. They can also be born again with each new child, who acquires a *mupashi* as a guardian spirit, either from his mother's or his father's line, or from the royal dynasty of the territory in which he is born. These guardian spirits can also be inherited, and each dead man or woman is succeeded by a close relative of the same sex who acquires his or her name and guardian spirit.

(ii) *Malignant spirits*, (*fiwa*) who are the spirits of those who died with a feeling of injury because of some violent death, or who left the world with a sense of grievance. *Fiwa* return to strike their descendants with illness or misfortune.

(iii) *Living persons* who can produce good fortune by blessing (*ukupala amate*), which they do chiefly by calling on the ancestral spirits to which they have special right of address; or cursing, which they do through some less specified evil force. The blessings of a chief or a man in authority are particularly potent because of the great spirits such powerful persons have access to. The head of a matrilineage, or an important member of it can also bless in this way. A great social personage who has been injured or not given his due, is feared because he may withhold the blessings of the spirits, or actually pronounce curses (*ukutipa* or *ukulapishya*). The curse is specially important in relation to procreation and childbirth, since the malevolent wishes of the father's sister can produce barrenness in the woman, or impotence in the man. This is described as 'the great curse'. There are, however, a number of curses which can be used by injured people, who 'throw lightning' or are said to be able to 'throw lions', or who can threaten to curse, if their property is stolen, or when specially distressed by the treatment they have received.

(*b*) Impersonal forces include (i) *Magic* in general (*bwanga*), which is the force contained in the leaves, roots or barks of various trees or shrubs and a number of activating agencies (*fishimba*), such as parts of animals or human beings, which can be used by the specialist magician (*yanga*) for beneficent purposes (health, the production of crops, fertility and success) or for harmful purposes (illness, death or crop failure). *Buloshi* is evil magic or

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with her, is also a danger to all the men concerned. These triple relationships are constantly mentioned in court cases and are made the subject of claims by the injured family of a dead man or woman who declare that 'their child' has been killed in that way. They recur in narratives of the rather lurid sex lives of Bemba princesses who are expected to take many lovers, but must not bring trouble on the land by simultaneous relations of this kind.

Lastly, in common with many Bantu peoples, Bemba believe that, if a man commits adultery while his wife is pregnant, the baby is born dead. He has taken the spirit of the child (*asendo umupashi wa umwana*). If the woman is unfaithful while she is pregnant, then she herself dies in childbirth unless she confesses and gets medicine in time.[1]

I have dilated on this system of attitudes and beliefs because I think it fundamental to the understanding of Bemba puberty ritual and also because it cannot fail, I think, to strike the field-worker in this area as one of the basic elements of tribal dogma. It would be impossible to live long in a Bemba village without running constantly across instances of the effects of these beliefs whether in terms of ritual or in the most practical problems of cooking, catering and entertaining. If the Bemba can be said to have an ideological obsession in the sense that they are constantly pre-occupied with one set of fears, it is this belief in the magical potency of sex, fire and blood. Such emotional attitudes set us puzzling problems. In this chapter I shall confine myself to stating them. Later in the book I hope at least to suggest some hypotheses which may stimulate comparative research in other tribes holding similar beliefs.

To recapitulate, Bemba dogma stresses the role of the ancestors in determining human fortunes as well as the power of injured spirits, who revenge the injustices they suffered on earth on the

[1] It will be seen from the above that the causes of barrenness or death in childbirth are numerous among the Bemba. Barrenness may be due to the special curse of the father's sister; to an injured spirit returning to punish a descendant at random; to allowing the umbilical cord of a baby to fall to the ground; to adultery; or to witchcraft. Miscarriage is thought to be due to an injured spirit shaking the womb of the pregnant woman so that the baby falls out; when it occurs all the women of the matrilineage must be treated with medicine. Death in childbirth is due to the adultery of the mother herself.

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769 living. It also emphasizes the magical powers associated with sex
831 which is linked with feelings of guilt and anxiety expressed in the taboos clustered round marriage, childbirth and the rearing of children. This feeling of guilt is so widely diffused that innocent
[783] people are thought to suffer from the magical results of a sex misdemeanour committed by someone else.

581 These beliefs support the institution of marriage since safety
789 from magical danger is acquired by means of a ceremony which can
837 only be carried out by a man's head wife. No Bemba supposes that a husband will be kept from adultery by this means, but the legal wife is the only person who can secure him and those near him from the resultant punishment.

622 The reader is asked to bear in mind, without attempting further
372 analysis, the association that exists in Bemba ideology between
831 chieftainship, fire, sex and power to influence the fertility of the
789 land and its people, and to remember that these powers are hurt
753 by blood, intercourse out of marriage, death, murder, lion-killing and all cold, terrible or 'bad things' (*fibi*). Fertility which is so much desired is produced by conduct pleasing to the ancestors, and to senior and especially paternal relatives, the blessings of persons in authority and the carrying out of the ritual of marriage. Illness is inflicted usually on the innocent party, by sex relations out of marriage without ritual purification, by bad conduct, and because of injury to people who, since they have died in a state of righteous indignation, will 'come back' to haunt the family which did them wrong.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

612 The most characteristic features of the Bemba social structure
611 are its hierarchical and authoritarian type of government, of which
591 the apex is a paramount chief believed to have supernatural powers; and its system of matrilineal descent with uxorilocal marriage.

643 The political structure of the Bemba is a centralized one. Its unity under a single head, the *Citimukulu*, was achieved, in 1931 at any rate, because of a belief in the spiritual powers the king was

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622 There was no permanent property to bind a man to one area rather than another and men moved easily to live with one relative or another. The headman's prime difficulty was in fact to persuade relatives to join him or if they had already done so to persuade these kinsmen not to leave him!

The headman could command small gifts in tribute and a little service. He also had a shrine to his own personal ancestors and performed ceremonies for the good of the village. He purified the village by an act of ritual intercourse with his chief wife and his fire was regarded as the fire of the village.

644 Princesses had an important part to play in the political system. The mother of the Citimukulu was known as the Candamukulu and she ruled over a small territory in the king's district and was thus in the position of sub-chief to him. The same was true of another royal princess, the Mukukamfumu who also had a sub-chieftainship in her own right. Both these princesses had important ritual functions to perform in tribal ceremonies.

614 173 The Bemba are organized in matrilineal clans distinguished by totemic observances, stereotyped forms of greeting between clan members, joking relationships with paired and opposite clans,[1] and honorific titles. Clan members reckon descent from a common ancestress and her brother, and they tell the legendary tale of the first arrival of these forebears in the country. They remember the villages where their ancestors first settled, although neither the clan nor any of its subdivisions can be regarded as localized groups at the present day. Clans are ranked in some kind of precedence, according to the order in which their ancestors are thought to have arrived in the country from the west.

611 ● 769 Within the clan great emphasis is laid on the principle of matrilineal descent. Ancestors are remembered in prayers before the shrine of a head of a family. Here a man will pray to the spirit of his maternal grandfather or maternal uncle, if the latter is already dead. The spirit of a maternal ancestor is thought to quicken the child in its mother's womb and to protect it all its life. The name of this ancestor or ancestress is discovered by [553] divination, and given to the child. When a man dies his name, his

[1] See my 'Reciprocal clan relationships among the Bemba of North-Eastern Rhodesia', in *Man*, vol. XXXVII, 1937.

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When a man dies his name, his kinship duties and his hereditary bow are passed on to his sister's son or to her grandson through a daughter. The heir actually becomes the dead man in a social sense: he adopts the kinship terms the latter used, calling, for instance, 'maternal nephew' the person he would previously have called 'brother'. The same positional succession takes place in the matrilineal line for women, and a dead woman will be replaced by her sister or a maternal granddaughter. In this system women are honoured as the bearers of many children and such a woman is said to found a house.

In the case of the royal crocodile clan the maintenance of descent is even more important. All senior chieftainships in Lubemba, the country of the Bemba, are held by members of the royal lineage.

A successor to such a chieftainship has access to 'great spirits', those of his dead predecessors, and he not only prays to them at the sacred shrines in his capital, but he acquires supernatural powers in his own person, so that he can bless and curse. His good health and vitality bring blessings to the community, and his ill-health or death, the reverse.

Princesses have the special duty to bear fine children in order to provide the country with chiefs, and they are honoured for doing so. The spirits of royal women are mentioned in prayer in tender and grateful terms as 'those who carried us in skins on their backs and gave us suck'. The first ancestress, Bwalya Cabala, is buried in a grove which is one of the most sacred places in Lubemba.[1]

Bemba clans are not segmentary. The effective kinship group within the clan is a three or four generation group, the men and women who trace their descent to a common great-grandmother and who remember a village of origin (*cifulo*). These are not corporate matrilineages in any territorial sense. The kinship system makes for a great deal of movement from village to village during a man's or a woman's life. The villages themselves change in composition and move from place to place following the shifting cultivation.

There appear to be no fixed leaders of the matrilineage, except in the case of the royal dynasty, but this group is the unit of succession to the offices and the names of dead men and women and to their ancestral spirits.

[1] Cf. *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia*, p. 357.

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admonition, as in the ceremony of *ukushikula* after marriage or the installation of a new chief or chieftainess. The same words are used for all these constituent ritual acts, and it would be difficult for a passer-by to distinguish one rite from another.

This fact surely accounts for the importance of the chisungu rite in Bemba culture. It is the occasion on which the girl is given her fire and her marriage pot and made responsible for their care and their use. On her handling of the hearth depends her husband's power of access to his ancestral spirits or, if she be married to a headman or chief, the blessings which are available for gardens, bush and village, political life and warfare. A glance at the chart will show that except for individual magic rites, there are no ceremonies in the last column which do not, in the last resource, depend on the chisungu or on the abbreviated forms of puberty ceremony now carried out instead. The supernatural powers of the Citimukulu and his brother chiefs are directly pivoted on the chisungu and its magic and didactic acts; this purely feminine rite is therefore essential to the welfare of the whole tribe.[1]

The chisungu can also be considered of importance to the maintenance of tribal traditions, because of its direct emphasis on 'things handed down'. The *mbusa* are referred to specifically in this way and this is said to be their value. The central act of an economic rite is a prayer and supplication to the ancestors when the officiant asks for what is wanted, blessings on the seeds for instance, or peace. He asks for them from beings who will not always grant these requests. The words are uttered spontaneously and the sentences have no very fixed form. They mention individual ancestors by name, vary the terms of address, and add a number of immediate and special requests as well as the more usual demands for blessings and fertility. For instance a headman offering the first fruits to the ancestor was heard to add at the end of his discourse a fervent appeal that I might not miss when I went out shooting, as I had on the previous day.

The defined elements here are the time and method of approach to the ancestors and the status and position of the officiant. With

[1] This suggests a hypothesis for comparative research. If my interpretation of the importance of the chisungu is correct a similar emphasis on instruction and care in handling fire will be found wherever the chief's supernatural power is thought to be closely linked to it. This question will be discussed.

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these conditions fixed there is a wide range of possible wants that can be voiced, meeting the need of the moment or of the group or the person concerned. These are rites of supplication in which the Bemba voice their needs and try to persuade themselves that they will be fulfilled.

In the chisungu however the women do not voice new desires, but always those that have existed in the past. The rites consist of an intricate succession of acts the value of which lies in more or less exact repetition. The *mbusa* must be made in the same way and the pottery models on the floor cannot be altered. These are rites which represent and proclaim the established rather than ones which enable the performers to meet new needs. The mimes and emblems of these initiation rites form a charter for the transfer of roles that have to be constantly assumed in each generation. They do not grant the men or women who perform them any help in the present troubles of Bemba married life, such as the prolonged absence of men from the tribal areas or the growing divorce rate. There is no element in them of supplication or prayer. It is for this reason that the chisungu must be reckoned as a rite of maintenance of tribal traditions.

To turn again to the chart it will be seen that all the major rituals of the Bemba reflect the importance they attach to fertility and the supply of food. The chisungu is more closely concerned with fertility than rites of supplication performed by chiefs, yet I never heard a prayer uttered by a chief which did not contain a special appeal to the ancestors for parenthood (*bufyashi*). The cycle of agricultural ceremonies is one of the most important tasks the chiefs are responsible for. The links between the three sets of rites are here close.

It is not easy to account for the tremendous emphasis on fertility and the care of children in Bemba culture. The desire is likely to be strong in all societies where social structure is largely based on descent and groups can only be enlarged by the birth of new children. There are, however, many African tribes with similar social structures in which the emphasis on fertility does not seem to be ritualized in this pronounced way. But it must be remembered that in Bemba culture the lack of any permanent form of possessions makes rights over labour—here rights over the

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months before puberty and forms of partial intercourse are practised before she is fully grown. Yet, in spite of this, intercourse is thought to be dangerous. Moreover, it is the act within the marriage bond that is feared, not the act outside it.

The taboos surrounding marriage may be accounted for superficially in terms of Bemba belief, as I have already tried to show. Since it is through marriage that a man is able to get into touch with his ancestral spirits, the relationship is, for that reason, considered dangerous; dangerous because it is a source of power. Taboos of the Bemba type may exist in other tribes where access to ancestral spirits can only be made after an act of intercourse in legal wedlock followed by purification. Data on this point are not available from other areas at present.

It is difficult to believe that the Bemba associate guilt with sex in marriage, even though they speak of married couples as being hot, or with 'bad things on their bodies', if they have not been purified in the approved way. It is at least possible that sex is only considered shameful in association with a man's ancestors who are, in this society, his maternal uncles and grandfather. In daily life a Bemba behaves with reticence and shyness before his mother's brother since he may one day inherit the latter's wife together with his name, his status and his bow.[1] There may thus be an extension to the spirit world of attitudes to living relatives, which would explain the resolute attempt to keep a 'hot' person away from the spirit shrines.

The taboos may also reflect the anxieties associated with marriage in Bemba society, for it is, after all, a frail link on which to depend for an approach to supernatural power. Margaret Read has pointed out that among the Nyasaland Ngoni, who are patrilineal with strong patrilineages, and who practise marriage by bride-wealth, girls are protected before marriage and the ceremony involves a test of virginity. After marriage there are few, if any, taboos on handling fire. Among the neighbouring Cewa who are,

[1] It is possible that the castration complex takes a different form in matrilineal societies in which a young man succeeds to the role of his maternal uncle and not his father. The reluctance to associate sex with an approach to the ancestors may be connected with it. Malinowski made suggestions along these lines in 1927 in *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* but little serious comparative work has been done on these lines since then, so far as I know.

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Pragmatic Effects

In Lubemba the chisungu puts power into the hands of the *nacimbusa*, who is an authority outside the girl's own family although in some cases she is the sister of the girl's father. She is not a member of the bride's own matrilineage. A mother cannot 'dance' her own daughter even though she is a *nacimbusa* of repute, in this initiation ceremony which enforces the rules of marriage and maternity.

The ritual mechanisms used in the chisungu may be further elucidated by continued comparison of this cycle of rites with the chiefly ceremonies already referred to. The difference between the two is striking. It is not only that the ancestral ceremonies consist of prayers while the chisungu consists of meticulously performed magic rites, and mimes, but that the personnel of the two ceremonies is selected in quite dissimilar ways. Those who approach ancestors—the chiefs, priests and headmen—do so by virtue of descent. The ritual is handed on by hereditary succession in the case of headmen, who use quite simple prayers to the ancestors. In the case of big chiefs, who are the focus of very complex ritual, the ceremonies are in the hands of ritual specialists, also chosen on the basis of descent (*bakabilo*). Thus the long rites for the burial of a Citimukulu, the installation of his successor and the building of his new village are controlled by hereditary buriers and keepers of the king's shrines, or by clan authorities with special ritual functions at the court. The chisungu is mainly carried out by commoners with no special relation to the chief and his court, although its occurrence will be reported to the ruler, as is any other important event in his territory. The *banacimbusa* are individuals who have won their way to their position instead of inheriting it. The officiants at the nubility rites are selected on the basis of age, personality and, to a certain extent, location, rather than of lineage, clan or descent from a royal line.

There is a marked difference too in the way the rites are performed. The headman tends to pray to his ancestors at dawn or dusk when the village is quiet and no one is passing to and fro. It does not matter whether other worshippers are present. The rites of great chiefs are secret and no unauthorized people can be present when the Citimukulu prays before his relic shrine. Death used to be the penalty for the man who entered a shrine without due permission.

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881 622 769 due permission. The common people hope and believe that the rites have been performed for them; they do not think that they themselves have a part to play as worshippers. There are secret elements in the nubility rites, but they are mysteries of interpretation and linguistic usage rather than ceremonies carried on behind barred doors. The main features of a chisungu on the other hand are its crowds and its thronging dancers. Again the ancestral ceremonies are performed in a reverent and quiet way. Nothing could be in greater contrast than the spirit of the chisungu with its noisy dancing and singing, its extravagant burlesque and its crowded scenes. The chisungu proclaims and teaches and requires a big concourse for its effect: it repeats, reaffirms and hands on by emblem and mime. The ancestral prayers are supplications to spirits who can give and withhold. The approach to them is difficult and can only be made by men in authority who have made themselves ritually pure. If Bemba believe in chiefs at all, they believe that they are worshipping chiefs acting as intermediaries for them, because that is their concept of kingship. They do not need to watch the rite of supplication itself.

121 I have tried to find explanations for an elaborate set of rites. They were ceremonies performed by people of a culture that was strange to me and in a language which I did not understand thoroughly enough for an adequate study of verbal symbols. The task has been one which no anthropologist could hope to achieve completely, but it extended my knowledge of Bemba institutions and values and set me, and I hope others, problems for comparative study in other matrilineal tribes. It has given me a conception of the great variety of different purposes which men seek to achieve by ritual behaviour.

I have interpreted the functions of the chisungu ritual from a number of points of view. I have taken it as given that some of the emotions associated with growing up in human society are universal, although they are expressed in a variety of different ritual forms. I have shown that the rites perform a particular function for Bemba society, for the different groups of which it is composed, such as the matrilineages and the extended family, and also for the individual actors in the ceremony—the girls chivvied here and there under their covering blankets, the anxious mothers waiting

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Appendix A

with girls' among the peoples of Mozambique origin as they do on the coast from which the Yao, Makua and Makonde come, but the girls' rites are not mere replicas of the boys' but are definitely a series of nubility ceremonies starting with puberty and ending with the celebration of pregnancy and childbirth. The coincidence between matriliny and agricultural activities which was postulated by some of the earlier evolutionary writers, such as Bachofen and Schmidt, exists here in actual fact.

This correlation has probably little bearing on the chisungu, except that in this area the introduction of stock has usually been followed by the giving of cattle as a marriage payment for the bride and hence the bridegroom's acquisition of rights over his children, and his achievement of the equally important right of virilocal residence. Where the high marriage payments are made, as in Angola or in parts of Nyasaland, the Bemba matrilineal, uxorilocal marriage by service pattern, which I have tried to associate with girls' fertility ceremonies, tends to disappear.

I cannot test the validity of the correlation I tried to suggest between the importance of the Bemba chisungu and an ancestral cult mainly carried out by chiefs. The evidence is not full enough on this point. Nevertheless it is worth pointing out that the Bemba are the only people in this group with ritual kingship and a centralised government developed into key institutions of the whole tribal structure, and the Bemba ceremonies are more complex than those of any of the other tribes mentioned. The rites among Kazembe's Lunda may be found to be as complex, but on the present evidence, the Bemba are the only other tribe in the group which has, or had, a 'divine' king, chiefs with ritual powers, matrilineal descent and uxorilocal marriage. From the evidence at present available the ceremonies that come next in order of complexity are those of the Yao. Here there is no 'divine king' or centralized organization, but the strength of the matrilineage and the emphasis on matrilineal descent as a basis of residence seems to be stronger than in the other tribes in the area, judging from Mitchell's evidence. The other questions I have asked throughout this book must await their answers when the field evidence is fuller.

624 blessing the gardens before firing, the seeds before sowing, and the first fruits of a number of crops. He must organise the payment of tribute and labour to the district chief and pass on chiefly orders and requests. His privileges include the right to personal service from younger relatives and tribute of beer and/or meat. Primarily, however, the position is valued not for economic advantage but for the authority it brings, the command over a small following and the favour of a chief. The sanctions for this authority consist mainly in the headman's popularity, the strength of kinship ties between him and the villagers and their belief that it is dangerous to allow an elder relative to die while cherishing a sense of injury. Ultimately, of course, the headman's power depends on the support of his territorial chief and nowadays of the British Administration.

621 The functions of the different types of Bemba chief differ only in degree from those of the headman. Like a headman, a chief is in charge of his
622 own village, his *musumba*, and he tries to maintain and augment this community by acquiring a reputation for popularity and generosity. A chief's village in the old days was described as having thousands of inhabitants. Big chiefs' villages observed by Richards in 1934 had 400 to 600 huts. They were divided into quarters (*fitenta*) ruled over by loyal supporters of the chief, known as *bafilolo*.

622 Besides administering his own village the chief was responsible for mak-
[692] ing and confirming the appointment of headmen; and presiding over a court composed of advisers mainly drawn from his own village. Witchcraft cases
[681] had to be brought to a chief and only the more important among them could administer the poison ordeal by *mwafi*. The chief could in the old days punish by savage mutilations and by selling a man into slavery. Economically the chief was responsible for initiating agricultural activities by performing the necessary rite at the time of tree-cutting, sowing or harvesting. With the tribute labour at his disposal he made big gardens and built gra-
[721] naries from which he fed his courtiers, messengers and workers. The chief initiated military raids and other forms of warfare, and the great Bemba chiefs maintained their monopoly of Arab guns which they traded for slaves. Bemba country was, in fact, an area of strong centralised government. The chieftains of the Aushi, Unga and other associated tribelets were on a much smaller scale and weaker in political organisation.

[785] But the most important and characteristic activities of the Bemba chiefs are ritual. They are reckoned to have in their own persons power to bless
[763] and curse. They have to be protected from contact with death and to keep sex taboos of various kinds for the welfare of the whole territory. It is probable that the Bemba Paramount Chief in the old days might have been described as a "divine king" in Frazer's sense of the word; he was strangled
● [769] when on the point of death so that his spirit should pass into the land. The Bemba chief derives his ritual power from the fact that he has succeeded to the names of dead chiefs and is thus enabled to call on a long line of ancestral spirits. Chiefs possess sacred relics - usually stools - which are
622 known as *babenye* and kept in special huts protected by "wives of the dead"
778 or descendants of wives of earlier chiefs. An approach to the ancestral spirits is made at these shrines. Chiefs also sacrifice at the deserted shrines of their predecessors (*mfuba*) and at other spirit centres in the area.

Much of their power depends on the keeping of sex taboos and the

776 children to men and is the original source of magic power. *Leza* is not, however, the object of any cult and is never directly addressed by the Bemba.(1) There is some suggestion that *Leza* is believed to act as a judge of the dead, but it is not clear how far this is a reflection of Christian teaching.

778 825 Shrines are put up in Bemba country to a hunting god, *Kalenga*, thought to be the spirit of a forgotten ancestor. There are also traces of serpent worship in two or three centres in Bemba country where sacrifices are made to pythons believed to live in caves or near waterfalls.

The Aushi believe in *Nkumbo*, a tribal god. While only chiefs and priests have seen him, he is generally thought to be small - about two feet in height - black and hard like stone. *Nkumbo* is very closely bound up with the idea of paramountcy among the Aushi but is clearly much more than mere "insignia of office"; he is worshipped and offerings are made to him; he is conceived both as a god and as a person, and is served by his own priests and priestesses. His association with the history of Aushi has already been mentioned. (See above p.8.)

(b) THE ANCESTRAL CULT

769 Some reference has been made in preceding sections to the ancestral spirits. Many ceremonies are connected with them and the part played by ancestral spirits in general and those of chiefs, and especially of the Paramount Chief, is the core of Bemba religion. These spirits (*Mupashi*, pl. *Imipashi*) are worshipped on all the chief occasions of the agricultural year, particularly at tree-cutting and harvest time, and also in times of tribal disaster or emergency. It may be remarked in passing that the ritual practices associated with these occasions were formerly very elaborate but are now being carried out with diminishing ceremonial and by fewer people, even though the beliefs behind the practices still seem to be dominant in the minds of the people.

769 778 The *Imipashi* are to be approached in certain well-defined ways among which are the calling of their names, prayers, and offerings of material objects. They may be invoked at the following places: firstly, the hut of every householder serves as a shrine, since his own ancestral spirits tend to linger there in the half-light of dawn and dusk to be invoked at the crises of life: birth, marriage, illness and death. In some areas food is placed for their appeasement but there is not, as among the Ila, a separate part of the hut set aside for them. The focal point of religious activity in the village is the headman's hut or a small shrine built outside it. Here the spirits of the headman's ancestors are invoked in all matters concerning the wider welfare of the village. In some areas shrines are put up to the spirits of the former owners of the land who are addressed by the village headman.(2)

(1) The position described by Smith and Dale in *The Ila-speaking Peoples of Northern Rhodesia* is very similar.

(2) Among the Unga priests operate independently of the chiefs: the fusion of secular and spiritual authority is not so complete as it is among the Bemba. For details see *Africa*, 3, 1946, Chap. XI.

769 778 Spirits are also worshipped, as has been mentioned, at the chiefs' relic huts, at the sites of dead chiefs' villages, which are revered as spirit centres, and at remarkable natural objects such as caves and waterfalls (*ngulo*) which are also thought to be spirit centres. Major chiefs are buried in a sacred grove guarded with great care by a priest, the *shimwalale*. This is the home of the most powerful tribal spirits and an animal used to be sacrificed here on the rare occasions when drought was [782] [787] threatened. The spirits of the chiefs also manifest themselves in the presence of possessed men and women who prophesy and heal. Ancestral spirits are approached by the man or woman who has succeeded to their name and guardian spirit, that is to say, the head of a small local lineage, a headman or a chief.

769 782 783 Ancestral spirits are addressed after a ritual sexual act between the officiant and his wife, followed by ceremonial purification. The spirits are addressed by name and some form of sacrifice, e.g. beer, cloth, flour and chickens, is offered to them.

(c) MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT

789 Bemba and Bisa believe in the potency of *bwanga* which may be translated as "magic". Bemba magical rites depend for the most part on medicine (*muti*), usually part of a plant or tree, sometimes with the addition of energizing charms giving potency to the medicine. Words are sometimes used but, as with the Azande, there is less insistence on and less importance attached to the spell than to the rite and the medicines. It is the magician (*Ng'anga*) who procures and uses the medicine and from whom it may be purchased. To ensure effectiveness the *Ng'anga* must invoke *Leza*, without whose consent the medicines are thought to be ineffectual.

Magic is used for general protective purposes - to ensure fertility, good health and luck, to give staying power to food. In the economic sphere magic seems to be used less among the Bemba than the Bisa. Richards suggests that the greater development of the ancestral cult among the former is the reason for this.(1)

754 787 Magic is also used in divination. The commonest form of divination is the rubbing of an axe over a skin until it sticks in answer to a question, and boiling of medicine in a pot until the mixture bubbles over one side or the other side. Another characteristic form of Bemba divination is the hunting ritual used to ascertain the cause of a person's death, according to whether a male or female animal is first driven into the hunting nets. This rite can be used as a preliminary test for witchcraft. In the old days the *lilemfo*, or war fetish, originally obtained from the Lunda chiefs near Lake Mweru was employed. This was a horn placed on a spike which was [278] thought only to work if smeared with the blood of a human victim. *Mwafi*, the poison used as a test for witchcraft from the Southern Sudan to Southern Rhodesia, was used by the senior chiefs in this area.

754 Evil magic, or sorcery, was distinguished as *bulochi*, a term which covers witchcraft, in the sense of inborn power, as well as the manipulatio

(1) Richards, *A*, 1939, pp.216, 187.

pants from the contemplation of their loss he makes jokes at the expense of the dead man and behaves in a fashion which in other circumstances would be considered outrageous and would not be tolerated. 764

Kazembes considered themselves as potentially immortal; thus the death of a Kazembe was attributed to neglect of magical precautions against witchcraft.(1) According to Pinto, slaves and wives of a dead Kazembe were sacrificed and a ten-day period of authorised licence followed during which robberies were allowed.(2) 954 643 782

It was believed that the living and the dead could communicate. Life after death resembled that led while alive.(3) 775

RELIGIOUS AND MAGICAL BELIEFS AND RITUAL

The concept of the high-god Leza is common to the Bemba-speaking peoples. *Leza*, the creator, is regarded rather as a nature force than a personal deity and is not the object of an organised cult. He manifests himself in thunder, lightning, and the rainbow and can kill by lightning or epidemics, but generally interferes little. 776

The *ngulu*, nature spirits residing in animals, trees, stones, hills, caves, ponds, waterfalls, can bring good weather and crops and are prayed to in an emergency. This cult is of non-Lunda origin and has probably come from the Chishinga, Lungu and Bemba country. Most of the dwelling-places of these spirits are found on the escarpment hills and on the plateau. The *afumu ya mipashi* (chiefs of spirits), which can enter and possess people making them dance, are local deities whose beneficient activity is confined to the village or district. [177]

When the general well-being of the community was concerned the spirits of dead Kazembes, *masamo*, were consulted and presented with offerings of cassava, beer and goats. Kazembes were buried at a place north-east of the old capital with which it was connected by a broad pathway(4) still discernible. Each had a shrine which was tended by a guardian-priest, *mwine masamo*,(5) whose office was hereditary. These keepers of the royal graves sought the advice of the oracle when war was contemplated and invoked the assistance of the spirits.(6) The River Lualaba, in which Kazembe the founder of the dynasty rests, was held in veneration. Processions went there annually at harvesting time. It is said that Keleka was the first Kazembe who failed to lead the procession in person, and the famine and smallpox epidemic which later occurred were attributed to his negligence.(7) The Kazembe is said to have been the highest religious authority.(8) 769 643 764 778 731

Carved wooden figures representing dead ancestors (*nkisi*) were kept in special huts and received offerings of beer, cassava, flour, hemp and tobacco.(9) Kazembe had several such figures, some named after dead chiefs, which were carried before the army in battle.(10) 778 532 769

(1) Valdez, II, p.242.
(2) Burton, p.128.
(3) Valdez, op.cit., p.243.
(4) Valdez, II, p.231.
(5) Burton, p.103.
(6) Valdez, op.cit., p.248.
(7) Valdez, II, p.257.
(8) ibid., p.243.
(9) Livingstone, I, p.353.
(10) ibid.

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continuity of the mother's line of ancestors which is the basis of legal identification with her descent group.[1] A royal princess might even produce an heir by a slave father in the old days without lowering her child's prestige. The relationship between brother and sister, which is a very close one, legally and ritually, is based on the fact that the two were born from one womb, and in the case of the royal family it appears to be equally strong when the two are children of different fathers. These theories of procreation account, not only for the matrilineal descent of the Bemba, on which succession to chieftainship is based, but also for the rank accorded to the royal princesses as mothers of chiefs, and the headmanships and other positions of authority given them.

The Bemba dogma as to the influence of the dead over the living is also of the utmost importance as a basis for political authority. The spirit of a dead man (*umupashi*, plur. *imipashi*) is thought to survive as a guardian presence associated with the land or village site formerly inhabited, and as a spiritual protector of different individuals born in the same lineage group and called by the same name. The *imipashi* of dead chiefs become tutelary deities of the land they ruled over, and responsible for its fertility and the welfare of its inhabitants. They can be approached by the successor to the chieftainship at various sacred spots in the territory and at the sacred relic shrines (*babenye*) in his own village. A chief is said to be powerful because he 'has great *imipashi*!' It is for this reason he is described as the *umwine calo*, 'owner of the land', and it is important to note that in every case the most important *imipashi* and the most sacred relics are those of the first chiefs to enter the land, or the first occupants of a chieftainship.

This dogma as to the influence of the dead over the living inhabitants of a district, or the members of a descent group, is very similar to the general Bantu pattern. But the Bemba belief in the social identification between the dead man and his appointed successor seems to me to be particularly complete. It is the basis of the belief as to the supernatural influence exerted by the chief in his own person as distinct from his direct approach to the spirits

[1] The patrilineal tribes on the Nyassaland border consider the Bemba theory of procreation as entirely ridiculous. One Ngoni expressed his contempt, thus: 'If I have a bag and put money in it, the money belongs to me and not to the bag. But the Bemba say a man puts semen into a woman and yet the child belongs to her and not to him!'

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in prayer. When a man or woman dies, his or her social personality must be immediately perpetuated by a successor who passes through a special ritual (*ukupyanika*) and thus acquires the name, the symbols of succession (a bow for a man and a girdle for the woman), and the *umupashi* of the dead man. By this social identification, a man assumes the latter's position in the kinship-group, uses the same kinship terms and, in the case of a chief, it is almost impossible to tell when a man is describing incidents which took place in his own life or those of an ancestor two or three generations dead. So important is this social perpetuation of the dead considered that immediately after a death, before the successor has finally been appointed, a small boy or girl, usually a maternal grandchild, is chosen to inherit the name of the deceased temporarily (*ukunwa menshi*, 'to drink the water'). He or she is given some small piece of the latter's property and thereafter addressed as grandfather or grandmother, or whatever the right kinship term may be.

In the same way, a chief, once he has succeeded to the name, the spirit, and the sacred relics of his predecessor, has magic influence over the productive capacity of his whole territory. His ill health or death, his pleasure or displeasure, his blessings or curses, can affect the prosperity of the people, and even his sex life reacts on the state of the community.[1] For a chief to break a sex taboo is an act which may cause calamity to the whole people, and the rites by which he is purified after sexual contacts form one of the most important elements in the politico-religious ceremonial requiring the participation of thirty or forty hereditary officials (*bakabilo*) in the case of the paramount. Conversely, legitimate sex intercourse, especially as prescribed on certain ritual occasions, may actually be a health-giving influence. Any headman has a certain degree of supernatural influence in his own village as the successor to his predecessor's *umupashi*, but a chief has considerably more. For all these reasons, ritual precautions guard the sacred person of a chief. Special taboos must be kept to preserve the ritual purity of the ruler's sacred fire, and his sacred

[1] There are rumours that chiefs were throttled by their hereditary councillors when they were obviously sick unto death, for fear they took 'the land' into the grave with them. This information was sent me by Mr. T. Fox-Pitt after I had left the country and was afterwards checked by Mr. Godfrey Wilson. In fact it is probable that in the old days the Bemba chiefs would fall under Frazer's definition of a 'divine king'.

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really carried out by those who believe themselves to possess black powers'. In other areas, the possession of powers of black magic is inherited in certain families and openly recognized. In other tribes, among them the Babemba, no witch-doctor will ever admit that he possesses any magic of destruction, although he may grudgingly allow that he can sometimes protect those who are attacked by the spell of a sorcerer. In this particular the natives believe that they differ from neighbouring tribes, for I heard of a man who had made a journey to the country of the Batabwa to the North-West, where he said black magic could be openly bought and sold.

This, then, is the question we shall have to ask ourselves in trying to assess the strength of the *Bamucapi*. In accounting for failing luck and disaster, what sum of human ills is debited to the sorcerers' account? It is obvious that the problem is one of practical importance to the administrator. If a native announces that his child has been killed by the evil magic of a fellow human being, he is probably punished with a legal penalty, but if the same native volunteers his bereavement to be due to the anger of his dead great-grandfather, to him an equally credible statement, he will merely be received with a tolerant smile.

Now a characteristic of Bemba belief is the number of different causes to which human ills may be attributed, and of these witchcraft is at first sight not the most important. A man may suffer harm (*a*) because of the anger of his ancestral spirits (*mipaʃi*) to whom he owes certain duties of respect, and who are ultimately responsible for punishing any infringement of tribal law. The spirit of a commoner will punish members of his own particular family, though admittedly not mortally, while the *mupaʃi* of a chief may inflict disaster on the whole land, either in the form of general bad luck, or some dramatic disaster such as a locust plague: (*b*) through the vengeance of a haunting spirit (*ciwa*), the avenging ghost of an ancestor who died neglected, injured, or wrongfully accused by his relatives: (*c*) through the neglect of some important ritual, such, for instance, as that protecting the purity of the household fire; or the breaking of some moral rule such as adultery committed in special circumstances: (*d*) through punishment sent by a chief's *mupaʃi* as the result of a human curse (*kulapiʃya*) when the individual concerned cannot find out who has injured or stolen from him, and calls for divine aid. In all these cases there is one common

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feature. Punishment is only inflicted by the supernatural power when it is deserved. The religious dogma follows strictly the tribal morality and gives it its sanction. It stresses particularly that basic sentiment of Bemba society—the attitude of a man to authority in general and in particular to his chief. *Mipaſi* are injured if not given proper respect, while the whole land suffers if the chief defaults. So also in the case of the avenging *ciwa*, it is the failure to honour and stand by your relations which is punished, the typical case always given being that of the old mother who dies of starvation and neglect. Here again the *ciwa* may not even return and haunt the living without the permission of Lesa, the High-God, and only a spirit suffering under a legitimate grievance is allowed to avenge. The curse by the name of a dead chief will only light on the real offender.

To sum up, according to Bemba dogma most misfortune is believed to be due to wrong-doing, and in particular transgression of the rules of respect to authority. The cause of the disaster can be ascertained by divination, itself a mechanism socially approved and carried out by a reputable character, the *nganga*. The remedy can be procured by the purchase of medicine, by the performance of a laborious rite, and perhaps, most important of all, by the public admission of guilt.

In this apparently logical and orderly system there is, according to theory, only one incalculable element—the sorcerer (*muloſi*) who kills without rhyme or reason, for the sake of doing harm. The *baloſi* are enemies of society and running counter to its laws. They actually start their careers of crime by committing some outrageous act, such as father-daughter incest, or the murder of a baby of their own clan. They have various mythical attributes. They can make themselves invisible; kill at a distance; send magic birds to steal food from their enemies; and of course perform secret rites and possess and sell evil medicines. Now it is obvious that such sorcerers are actually non-existent, though their mythical attributes are readily credited to unpopular people of dour or difficult temperaments, bad mixers in the American sense, bad sharers, or persons who seem to be winning unusual success at others' expense. I would not be bold enough to say that no rites of evil magic are performed in Bemba country, or that there do not exist here and there individuals who believe themselves to possess such powers. But it is the reflection of the *buloſi* belief in